Jihadism and Suicide Attacks

al-Qaeda, al-Sahab and the Meanings of Martyrdom

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Cover design: Anna Woldring
Cover photograph: still from al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 20"

Printing: CPI Koninklijke Wöhrmann

ISBN 978-90-367-7040-8 (printed version)
ISBN 978-90-367-7045-3 (electronic version)

university of groningen

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PhD thesis

to obtain the degree of PhD at the
University of Groningen
on the authority of the
Rector Magnificus Prof. E. Sterken
and in accordance with
the decision by the College of Deans.

This thesis will be defended in public on

Monday 16 June 2014 at 12.45 hours

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CONTENTS

Part IV: MARTYRDOM VIDEOS

Acknowledgements

The idea for this book emerged during a conversation over coffee that I had with Fred Leemhuis in late 2006. His remarks on the visuals of Bin Laden's video appearances in the years after 9/11 inspired me to delve into the world of online jihadist videos, which eventually led to this book on al-Qaeda's suicide attacks and al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. After I had finished the manuscript and sent it to Fred, he replied to me in an email some days later: 'It is a pleasure to read, but not very cheerful – if you will forgive the paradox.'

From time to time, this paradox has also been applicable to the writing of this book. In the six years I have worked on this study, hundreds of suicide attacks have been carried out, killing thousands of people, mostly innocent men, women and children. But it was not only the victims of jihadist suicide attacks that made this research a gloomy undertaking at times, it was also the individual stories of the people I studied: often ordinary youths who had become frustrated by the predicament of the people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and elsewhere, and were convinced that their actions would contribute to the improvement of the situation of their brothers and sisters in need. In some cases, I must admit, I was struck by the fate of these men, most of whom would not see the age of thirty. Without justifying, let alone condoning their actions, I hope that my struggles in dealing with them will contribute towards a better understanding of these people and their unimaginable deeds.

At the same time, it has been a great pleasure to work on this book. The subject is not only disturbing, but also highly fascinating. Moreover, my research enabled me to work with many companionable and stimulating people, to whom I owe thanks. First of all, I am most grateful to the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, that gave me the opportunity to conduct my research in an enjoyable and stimulating environment. My fellow PhD students, and particularly the inhabitants of our 'Islam room', have been highly significant in this respect. I have greatly profited from many conversations with Marjo Buitelaar, Yme Kuiper and Fred Leemhuis during the almost ten years I have spent at the faculty, and I hope that this book reflects some of their invaluable insights. In addition, I want to express my gratitude to the Faculty of Arts, and in particular to the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, that has given me the opportunity to finish this book while contributing to its exciting new study programmes. Eelko, Kiki, Ronit and Wout, it is always a pleasure working with you – not to mention our almost proverbial 'team teaching' – and I am very much looking forward to the years to come. The students I have taught may not remain unmentioned in this respect, as they have been a source of pleasure and inspiration over the past years.

Many more people have directly or indirectly contributed to my research through their interesting discussions, by commenting on my papers and articles, reading (parts of) my dissertation or editing the manuscript. I would like to express my special gratitude to Hans Bakker, Wout van Bekkum, Hans Kippenberg and Fred Leemhuis in this respect. The person I owe the most to is my supervisor, Jan Bremmer. He gave me the freedom to pursue my own interests, while enabling me to

profit from his erudition, network and good eye for argument, structure and detail of texts. There were times that I could not remember whether he was in Cologne, New York, Erfurt or on one of the, I guess, fifty other places he visited for lectures and conferences while I was working on this book. Happily, he always replied to my emails or phone calls immediately, at all times willing to provide feedback and advice, be it during his own holidays or while standing at a parking lot near Almere on his way to a conference. Jan, I would like to thank you for your involvement, dedication and tireless efforts. I could not have wished for a better supervisor.

I am also obliged to my family and family-in-law. They have always supported me throughout the years, not least by taking care of Lois during the many weekends I spent behind my computer – although I never had the feeling that this was much of a punishment. I want to thank my friends, both in Groningen and in the Diaspora. I highly appreciated their never-ending attempts to tear me away from what has become known as 'the bloody book'. Two of them I would like to mention in particular: Thijs, my partner in crime in studying the atrocities committed by our contemporaries, and Peter, with whom I have been happily reunited at the university after having been deprived of his company for six harsh years. Birgit, I could have mentioned you in all the above paragraphs. I am grateful for the role you have played in my life and for our lasting friendship.

Most of all I want to thank Anna. It might have seemed an unlikely combination: art and academia, violins and violence. Nevertheless, we found each other during that summer in 2009 and now, a mere five years later, we are a family with our beautiful daughter Lois and her little brother or sister who we will get to know better in the upcoming months, *inshallah*. The happiness you have brought into my life and your support, patience, enthusiasm and, indeed, sacrifices throughout the past few years have enabled me to finish this book, for which I am forever grateful.

Glossary

This list contains the Arabic terms that are mentioned without further explanation at least once throughout this book. Many of the terms have multiple meanings, but this list only provides the meanings that are relevant for the purpose of this study.

akhira: the hereafter, as opposed to the world (*dunya*, q.v.).
'alim: see *ulama*.
'amaliyya istishhadiyya: martyrdom operation. Jihadists supporting this practice use the term to refer to suicide attacks.
al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar: command good and forbid evil. According to jihadists, the rulers in the Muslim world have disobeyed this doctrine by upholding man-made laws.
ansar: helpers, originally referring to the people in Medina who offered assistance to Muhammad when he met resistance by his fellow citizens in Mecca. Jihadists also use the term to refer to those people who assisted them after their 'emigration' (*hijra*, q.v.) to the battlefields (e.g. the Taliban).
'ashura: the tenth day of the month Muharram on which Shia Muslims remember the martyrdom of imam Husayn at Karbala.
bay'a: oath of allegiance. In the 1990s and early 2000s, al-Qaeda members took an oath of allegiance to Bin Laden, thus recognising his authority.
bid'a (pl. *bida'*): innovation. Jihadists consider *bida'* unacceptable additions to the pure Islam of *al-salaf al-salih* (q.v.).
al-dajjal: the false messiah who, according to Muslim traditions, will be battled by 'Isa (Jesus) in the period before the Day of Judgement.
dar al-islam: the abode of Islam. According to jihadists, the *dar al-islam* is invaded by unbelievers, which makes jihad (q.v.) an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*).
dhull: humiliation, shame. In al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, the term is associated with the current state of the *umma* (q.v.).
dunya: world. The term is used by jihadists in a negative fashion to refer to worldly affairs, as opposed to *akhira* (q.v.).
fatwa (pl. *fatawa*, *fatwas*): a legal opinion or advice from a person trained in Islamic law. The issuer of a *fatwa* is called a *mufti*, which is not necessarily a formal position.
fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence.
firdaws: the highest level of Paradise where the prophets, martyrs and most pious ones dwell.
fursan (sg. *faris*): knights, originally referring to horsemen. Jihadists use the term to denote their fighters, thus presenting them as the successors of the early Islamic fighters.
ghazwa (pl. *ghazawat*): raid, expedition, battle. The term is used to refer to the military expeditions of Muhammad. Jihadists also use the term to refer to suicide attacks.

hadith (pl. *ahadith*, *hadiths*): a report about the deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad. *Hadiths* are significant sources on the life of the Prophet and therefore crucial for jihadist thought and practice.

hajj: the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim (who is able to) should perform at least once in his or her lifetime.

hijra: emigration. The term is most often used for the emigration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in the year 622, but jihadists also use the term for their emigration to the battlefields.

houri: a Quranic term that has been translated in different ways, but is used by jihadists to refer to the women of Paradise who, in their view, are promised to martyrs.

ijtihad: independently interpreting the Islamic sources of law.

istishhad: martyrdom.

jahiliyya: ignorance, usually referring to the pre-Islamic period. Jihadists also use the term for the current state of affairs in the Muslim world: the 'modern *jahiliyya*'.

jihad: struggle, often used in combination with *fi sabil Allah*, 'in the way of God'. Muslim traditions distinguish between several forms of struggle, such as *jihad al-nafs* (q.v.) and *jihad bi-l-sayf* ('jihad by the sword', the armed struggle against evil). This study uses the term to refer to the armed struggle against perceived evil, unless otherwise indicated.

jihad al-nafs: jihad of the soul, the interior struggle against evil.

kuffar (sg. *kafir*): unbelievers. Jihadists use the term for both non-Muslims as well as apostates (*murtaddun*, see *murtadd*).

kufr: unbelief. See also *kuffar*.

kunya: an agnomen. After joining the jihad, jihadists usually adopt a *kunya*, which typically refers to one of Muhammad's companions or a heroic Muslim fighter.

manhaj: method, referring to the method of applying the Muslim creed. Jihadists argue that jihad should occupy a central place in the method to transform society after the example of the Prophet.

muezzin: a person who is appointed to recite the call to prayer (*adhan*).

muhajir (pl. *muhajirun*): migrant, most often used to refer to the Muslims who joined the Prophet Muhammad on his *hijra* (q.v.) from Mecca to Medina. Jihadists also use the term for their emigration to the battlefields.

mujahid (pl. *mujahidun*): jihad fighter. In this study, the term refers to the participants of the jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

munafiq (pl. *munafiqun*): hypocrites. Jihadists use the term to refer to people who, in their view, pretend to be Muslims but conceal their disbelief.

murabit (pl. *murabitun*): those performing *ribat* (q.v.).

murtadd (pl. *murtaddun*): apostate. Jihadists apply the term to the rulers in the Muslim world, because they uphold man-made laws (see *takfir*, *tawhid*).

nashid (pl. *anashid*, *nashids*): a piece of vocal music with a religious content. In al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, *nashids* are sung a capella and usually deal with jihad and martyrdom.

ribat: guarding the borders of Muslim lands. According to al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, this should follow migration (*hijra*, q.v.) and preparation (*i'dad*).

salaf: see *al-salaf al-salih*.

al-salaf al-salih: the pious ancestors. The term is used by jihadists for the first three generations of Muslims, who serve as an example and should be followed as closely as possible in all spheres of life.

shahada: the Islamic confession of faith, which sounds: 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.'

shahid (pl. *shuhada*): martyr, lit. witness. Traditionally, the term was mainly applied to people who were killed on the battlefield, but the definitions of martyrdom gradually broadened in the course of the history of Islam. Jihadists also use the term to refer to suicide bombers.

sharia (*shari'a*): Islamic law, which has been revealed by God in the Quran and the *Sunna* (q.v.) and should be derived from these sources by Muslim scholars. See also *ijtihad* and *taqlid*.

sheikh (*shaykh*): elder, leader, a title for a respected person, often for his religious knowledge.

sunna: the prophet Muhammad's exemplary way of life.

sura: a chapter of the Quran.

takfir: excommunication, declaring another Muslim to be an unbeliever (see *kuffar*). Jihadists apply *takfir* against the regimes in the Muslim world as well as against Muslims who in their view deviate from the pure Islam, such as Shia Muslims.

taqlid: blindly following an Islamic school of law (*madhhab*).

tawhid: oneness, the doctrine of God's absolute unity. Jihadists argue that *tawhid* not only implies that no one may be worshipped besides God, but also that the upholding of man-made laws is idolatry (*shirk*).

al-wala wa-l-bara: loyalty and disavowal. According to jihadists, this means that rulers in the Muslim world should be loyal to Muslims and distance themselves from non-Muslims.

ulama (*'ulama*, sg. *'alim*): Muslim scholars.

umma: the worldwide Muslim community.

wahn: weakness, feebleness. In al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, the term is associated with the current state of the *umma* (q.v.).

zuhd: asceticism, renunciation. A virtue associated with Sufism that has been appropriated by jihadists. See also *dunya*.

Transliteration and references

In this study, I have used a simplified form of Arabic transliteration. I have not included the long vowels and not differentiated the emphatic consonants from the non-emphatic. I have also omitted the final *ta marbuta* in words with the feminine ending. For the *'ayn* I have used ' and for the *hamza* ', though the latter is used only in the middle of words. For well-known terms and names, such as Quran, jihad, al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, I have used the common English spelling. In some cases, words have not been given their Arabic plural forms (e.g. *anashid*), but the simplified English ones (*nashids*).

Concerning the primary sources used for this study, I have provided the full links to the websites and forums where these sources can be found at the moment of writing (April 2004) in the bibliography. The footnotes contain shortened versions of these links or, if possible, references to English translations of the sources. The CD-ROM included in this book contains the video files and the English texts of four videos that have been highly significant for this research.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

1 Introduction

1.1 'The essence of religion'

Martyrdom is central to jihadism. It has been so since the rise of jihadism in the 1980s, when hundreds of Arabs went to Afghanistan in order to wage jihad against the Soviet forces who had invaded the country. Soon, heroic stories started to circulate about the battles that were fought by courageous and heavily under armed mujahidun.[1] Near the village of Jaji in eastern Afghanistan, a small group of fighters led by a Saudi named Osama bin Laden (1957-2011) supposedly heroically defended a compound against an assault by two hundred Soviet soldiers who were assisted by helicopters and fighter jets. 'The sky was raining bombs and the earth was erupting volcanoes', one of the participants narrated. Nevertheless, the Arab fighters were able to withstand the attack for about a week, after which they finally had to retreat.[2] Other reports were even more miraculous. On several occasions the mujahidun were assisted by angels and protected by birds, it was told, and some of the men were hit by bullets and overrun by tanks yet remained unharmed. Most of the accounts from the battlefields, however, concerned mujahidun who had fallen in battle and were considered 'martyrs'. Their brave actions and meritorious characters were recounted at length and their deaths narrated in detail. The miraculous events were considered proof that God was on their side. Repeatedly, it was told that the 'martyrs' had continued to visit their comrades in dreams and visions after death, and that their corpses spread a radiant light and the heavenly odour of musk, even months after they had been buried.[3]

Stories such as these propagated the significance of waging jihad in defence of the alleged 'Muslim lands'. Moreover, the stories contributed to the dissemination of the concept of martyrdom throughout the Islamic world. Martyrdom had never occupied a central place in the Sunni branch of Islam. Whereas Shia Muslims had developed an extensive martyrology, martyrs had been largely absent from Sunni history.[4] Yet, in the 1980s already, martyrdom was called the 'essence of religion' by one of the most renowned mujahidun in Afghanistan, the Palestinian 'Abdullah

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[1] In this book, the term 'mujahidun' ('strugglers', 'people doing jihad') is used solely for the Arab fighters who participated in the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. My use of the terms 'jihad', 'jihadism' and 'jihadists' is explained in Ch. 1.3.

[2] 'Abdullah 'Azzam, *Al-Qimma al-Shamikha* ['The Lofty Mountain'], n.d., n.p., available at www.tawhed.ws (Arabic) and www.hoor-al-ayn.com (English transl.), last accessed January 2014.

[3] These examples are taken from 'Abdullah 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi jihad al-Afghan* ['The Signs of God in the Afghan Jihad'], n.d., n.p., available at www.tawhed.ws (Arabic) and http://islamtheonlytruereligion.wordpress.com (English transl.), last accessed January 2014.

[4] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge 2007) 52 and 149.

'Azzam (1941-1989). Martyrs would define the destiny of the Islamic community, he wrote in a tract with the noteworthy title *Martyrs: the Building Block of Nations*, because 'history does not write its lines except with blood.' Therefore, he argued, young men should join the jihad in Afghanistan, inciting them by saying: 'O sons of Islam, what will cleanse our sins? What will purify our mistakes? And what will clean our dirt? It will not be washed except with the blood of martyrdom.'[5]

After the Russian retreat in 1989, most of the mujahidun left Afghanistan too, and the 'grand narrative of jihad through martyrdom', as Gilles Kepel has called it, spread throughout the Muslim world.[6] Instigated by 'Azzam's passionate writings and speeches and by the stories of the Afghanistan veterans, young men and women left their homes to join the jihad in new battlefields: in Algeria, Bosnia, the Caucasus, Iraq, Kashmir, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere. New martyrologies appeared from these regions and were distributed in magazines and books, on audio and video cassettes, and, later, on the World Wide Web, motivating others to join the jihad and sacrifice their lives. In the meantime, martyrdom and self-sacrifice became the 'formative ethos' of the champion of the jihadist movement, al-Qaeda.[7] This organisation, an offshoot of the jihad in Afghanistan, turned the jihad against the West and further underlined the importance of martyrdom in this battle. Bin Laden and his fellow fighters increasingly emphasised that martyrdom should be actively sought and, accordingly, propagated the use of so-called 'martyrdom operations'. Repeatedly, Bin Laden invoked his audience to 'become diligent in carrying out martyrdom operations' because 'these are the most important operations.'[8] 'We love this kind of death in the way of God', he said in an interview in 1997, 'it is something we wish for.'[9] Bin Laden's eventual successor as leader of al-Qaeda, the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri (b. 1951), went even further, stressing that 'it is the love of death in the path of God that is the weapon that will annihilate this evil empire of America.'[10] Dozens of young men would take words like these to heart, as became devastatingly clear from Bali to Baghdad and from Nairobi to New York.

As this history illustrates, jihadism has been inherently connected with the concept of martyrdom since its emergence in Afghanistan in the 1980s.[11] Where does this fascination with death and self-sacrifice come from? Why has martyrdom

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[5] 'Abdullah 'Azzam, *Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations*, transl. Azzam Publications, n.d., n.p., available at www.religioscope.com, last accessed January 2014.

[6] Gilles Kepel, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom: The Future of the Middle East*, transl. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge 2008) 78.

[7] Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore 2008) 78.

[8] Bin Laden, audio statement released on 27 December 2004, English transl. available in IntelCenter, *Words of Osama Bin Laden: Vol. 1* (Alexandria 2008) 79-100 at 93.

[9] Peter Arnett (CNN), Interview with Osama bin Laden, March 1997, available at www.youtube.com and http://news.findlaw.com (transcript), last accessed April 2014.

[10] Al-Zawahiri in an online interview with Qoqaz.net (October 2002), excerpt available in Elena Mastors and Alyssa Deffenbaugh, *The Lesser Jihad: Recruits and the al-Qaeda Network* (Lanham 2007) 42-43.

[11] Cf. Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (2003; London/New York 2004) 33-6; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York 2006) 107; Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 78-85; Kepel, *Beyond Terror*, 78; Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism: Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide* (London 2009) 59-61 and 64-75.

occupied such a quintessential place in jihadist discourse and why have so-called 'martyrdom operations' become jihadists' principal means of resistance? This study addresses these questions by examining the relationship between jihadism and martyrdom. In particular, it focuses on jihadist 'martyrdom operations' or, as this specific form of violence is called in this book, suicide attacks.

In this chapter, I further refine the subject of this study by starting with a brief survey of the existing literature on the topic in order to elucidate where this book fits in and why, after all, we need another book on a topic that has been so much talked about in the last one and a half decade (1.2). Then, the two central themes of this study, jihadism (1.3) and suicide attacks (1.4), are introduced, after which I explicate the sources that I have used for this research (1.5). The chapter closes with elucidating the argument of this study and providing a concise overview of the chapters to follow (1.6).

1.2 Studying jihadism and suicide attacks

Since the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, there has been a marked increase in the study of jihadism. Journalists, terrorism experts and (former) army or secret service members have produced hundreds of publications on jihadist organisations,[12] individuals[13] and attacks[14] since that Tuesday in September 2001. In addition, scholars from various disciplines have dedicated themselves to the subject, resulting in comprehensive studies on both jihadism in general[15] and its regional manifestations,[16] as well as on jihadist ideology and beliefs[17] and its social and

[12] See, for example, Yonah Alexander and Michael S. Swetnam, *Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network* (New York 2001); Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York 2001); Burke, *Al-Qaeda*; Angel Rabasa et al., *Beyond al-Qaeda Part 1: The Global Jihadist Movement* (Santa Monica 2006); Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al-Qa'ida* (London 2007).

[13] See, for example, Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York 2001); Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man*, transl. Ahmed Fekry (2002; London 2004); Jonathan Randal, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist* (New York 2004); Loretta Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq: Al Zarqawi and the New Generation* (New York 2005); Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al-Qaeda's Leader* (New York 2006).

[14] See, for example, Stefan Aust et al., *11. September, Geschichte eines Terrorangriffs* (Hamburg 2002); Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror: The Truth behind the Most Devastating Terrorist Attack the World Has Ever Seen* (New York 2003); Terry McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers: The Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It* (New York 2005).

[15] See, for example, Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad, *Middle East Policy* 8 (2001) 18-38; Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (London 2005); Thomas Hegghammer, 'Global Jihadism after the Iraq War', *Middle East Journal* 60 (2006) 11-32; Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London 2009); Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism*.

[16] See, for example, Mariam Abou Zahab and Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks: the Afghan-Pakistan Connection*, transl. John King (2002; London 2004); Alison Pargeter, *The New Frontiers of Jihad: Radical Islam in Europe* (London 2008); Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge 2010).

[17] See, for example, Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005) 75-97; Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist*

organisational structures.[18] By now, a small library can be filled with publications on jihadism.

Yet, despite the enormous growth of the field, research on jihadism still faces serious challenges. The most persistent of these is probably that the field is dominated by political studies and, especially since 9/11, terrorism studies, whereas cultural approaches have remained largely absent.[19] This becomes evident by looking at the study of jihadist suicide attacks, which is, hardly surprisingly, one of the most prominent themes within these studies.

Just like the research on jihadism, the study of suicide attacks has taken giant steps since 9/11. Numerous books and articles have been published on this specific form of violence, some focusing on particular cases,[20] others taking a comparative approach to study suicide attacks in various regions.[21] Generally, the role of the organisations behind the attack is emphasised, since, as a study from 2003 claims, more than 95 per cent of the suicide attacks that had been carried out up until that moment had been part of 'large, coherent political or military campaigns' by organisations.[22] Along these lines, various authors have argued that the use of suicide attacks is, in Martha Crenshaw's terms, 'a product of strategic choice.'[23] It is considered a rationally chosen means that, as Ami Pedahzur writes, 'is a product of an organization's political strategy after it has defined its goals, clarified the options it has in order to realize these goals and checked the price label attached to each

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Abu Mus'ab al-Suri (New York 2008); Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006) 207-39; Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London 2009); Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Theology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge 2012).

[18] See, for example, Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia 2004); Idem, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century* (Philadelphia 2008); Stephen Vertigans, *Militant Islam: A Sociology of Characteristics, Causes and Consequences* (London/New York 2009).

[19] Cf. Andrew Silke, 'The Road Less Travelled: Recent Trends in Terrorism Research', in Idem (ed.), *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures* (London 2004) 186-213; Vertigans, *Militant Islam*, 1.

[20] Cf. Mia M. Bloom, 'Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share and Outbidding', *Political Science Quarterly* 119 (2004) 61-88; Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: the Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers* (Washington 2006); Yoram Schweitzer (ed.), *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality* (Tel Aviv 2006); Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: the Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington 2007); Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*.

[21] Cf. Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs*, transl. David Macey (2002; London 2005); Christoph Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, transl. Helena Ragg-Kirkby (2002; Munich 2004); Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York 2003); Mia M. Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York 2005); Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford 2005); Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005; paperback ed. New York 2006); Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge/Malden 2005); Idem (ed.), *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (London 2006); David Cook and Olivia Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks: The Faith and Politics of Martyrdom Operations* (Westport 2007).

[22] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 4.

[23] Martha Crenshaw, 'The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behaviour as a Product of Strategic Choice', in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, State of Mind* (Washington 1990) 7-24.

operational method.'[24] So rather than irrational behaviour, suicide attacks are a deliberate and effective instrument used by organisations as a means towards certain ends, they claim.[25]

This 'rationalist paradigm for studying suicide terrorism', as it has been called, has dominated the research on suicide attacks so far.[26] Although this perspective may explain the strategic orientation of organisations, it hardly pays attention to the meanings that people give to suicide attacks, to the role of religious texts, narratives and rituals and to the importance of feelings of humiliation, vengeance and empowerment. Mohammed M. Hafez observes: 'We have yet to encounter many studies that seek to understand the social meanings of martyrdom for the actors involved. How do suicide bombers view their actions? What meanings do they give to their sacrifice? What meanings do sympathetic observers give to acts of suicide terrorism?'[27]

Rather than exploring jihadism and suicide attacks through the 'prism of security studies', this study takes a cultural approach and concentrates on the meanings that jihadists themselves have attributed to their violence.[28] In order to elucidate how this will be accomplished, I will first further introduce the central themes of this study: jihadism and suicide attacks.

1.3 Jihadism

1.3.1 Labelling jihadism

Although the term 'jihadism' is a clumsy neologism, it is more and more accepted as the least bad option in both the Arab and the Western world as well as in scholarly discourse. Yet the term jihadism and its alternatives suffer from 'a paucity of clear definitions' as well as 'inconsistencies in their applications', as one of the leading scholars of jihadism remarked.[29] This lack of clarity has resulted in what others have called a 'swamp of analytical confusion' surrounding the term jihadism and its alternatives.[30] Therefore, we should start our exploration of jihadism by explaining the use of the term in this book.

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[24] Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 27.

[25] See also Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (1998; New York 2006) 132; Diego Gambetta, 'Can We Make Sense of Suicide Missions?', in Idem (ed.) *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford 2005) 259-300 at 260.

[26] Mohammed M. Hafez, 'Dying to Be Martyrs: The Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism', in Ami Pedahzur (ed.), *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (London/New York 2006) 54-80 at 55.

[27] Hafez, 'Dying to Be Martyrs', 54.

[28] On the term 'prism of security studies', see Roel Meijer, 'Introduction', in Idem (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London 2009) 1-32 at 2.

[29] Thomas Hegghammer, 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 244-66 at 245.

[30] Guilain Denoeux, 'The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam', *Middle East Policy* 9 (2002) 56-81 at 56; Rüdiger Lohlker, 'The Forgotten Swamp Revisited', in Idem (ed.), *New Approaches to Jihadism: Online and Offline* (Vienna 2012) 125-39 at 125.

The term 'jihadism' and the adjectives 'jihadi' or 'jihadist' – the latter of which is used in this study – are derived from the Arabic term 'jihad' ('struggle', 'effort') from the verb *jahada* ('to strive').[31] Although the term 'jihad' is often equated with holy war in public discourse, its semantic field is actually much broader.[32] In the Quran already, *jahada* and its derivations signify several forms of striving, both non-violent and violent.[33] In later traditions, the major distinction between the various forms of jihad became that between the internal struggle against evil (*jihad al-nafs*, 'jihad of the soul') and the external efforts against evil, which might imply fighting (*jihad bi-l-sayf*, 'jihad by the sword').[34] Concerning the latter, Islamic scholars have distinguished a collective duty (*fard kifaya*) and an individual one (*fard 'ayn*). The offensive struggle to spread Islam was considered an obligation for the Muslim community as a whole and could thus be delegated to a limited group. The obligation to defend the 'abode of Islam' (*dar al-islam*) against invaders, however, was seen as an individual duty, incumbent upon each Muslim. This defensive form of jihad has become dominant in the course of the history of the Muslim community, as came to the fore during the Crusades and the Mongol invasions, as well as during the anti-colonial struggles in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Jihadists too, have emphasised the defensive nature of their jihad.[35] As noted above, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 resulted in a jihad to defend this part of the *dar al-islam*. In the following decades, the 'Afghan Arabs', as the mujahidun would become known, became leading figures in the jihads that were

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[31] On the concept of jihad, see Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague 1979); Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (New York 1999); Richard Bonney, *Jihād: from Qur'ān to bin Laden* (Basingstoke 2004); David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley 2005); Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton 2006).

[32] On jihad and 'holy war', see John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (eds.), *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (New York 1991); James Turner Johnson, *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (University Park, PA 1997); Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Götter Global: Wie die Welt zum Supermarkt der Religionen wird* (Munich 2014) 203-36.

[33] The root j-h-d occurs 41 times in the Quran and refers to different forms of striving. Compare, for example, Q. 9:41, 9:86 and 60:1, where it seems to denote armed fighting, and Q. 22:78 and 25:52, where other forms of striving are meant. In the former sense, the verb is closely related to *qatala* ('fighting'), which is often used in combination with *fi sabil Allah* ('in the way of God'). In order to legitimise their emphasis on the Quranic verses about armed warfare, jihadists embrace the theory of *al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh* ('the abrogating and the abrogated'), meaning that in case of two or more contradictory verses, the verse that was revealed later abrogates the earlier one(s). The earlier and more peaceful Meccan verses about the relationship with 'unbelievers' were thus abrogated by later Medinan ones, such as the so-called 'sword verse' (Q. 9:5). On theories of *naskh*, see John Burton, 'The Exegesis of Q. 2:106 and the Islamic Theories of Naskh', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985) 452-69.

[34] According to the non-canonical hadith of al-Bayhaqi, the Prophet called the interior jihad the 'greater jihad' (*jihad al-akbar*) and the external, armed jihad the 'smaller' one (*jihad al-asghar*). Cf. Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton 1996) 118; Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 35. In addition to the 'jihad of the soul' and the 'jihad by the sword', other types can be distinguished as well, such as the 'jihad by the tongue' (*jihad bi-l-lisan*), 'jihad by the pen' (*jihad bi-l-qalam*) or 'jihad by the hand' (*jihad bi-l-yad*).

[35] Because jihadists refer to the concept of jihad predominantly in the meaning of armed fighting against evil, this study uses the term 'jihad' in the same way unless otherwise indicated.

waged in other regions as well as in the jihads against alleged 'apostate regimes' in the Arab world. In their footsteps, the notion of a defensive jihad spread across the Muslim world. Moreover, spearheaded by al-Qaeda, it was increasingly aimed at the West, particularly the U.S. And whereas the effects of the jihad became visible far beyond the imagined borders of the traditional *dar al-islam*, especially since the quadruple suicide attacks of 9/11, it was still presented as a defensive jihad and, consequently, as an individual duty for each Muslim. This study, then, uses the term 'jihadism' in a heuristic way to denote the transnational movement that emerged from the jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s and claims to wage a global jihad on behalf of the *umma* to defend the lands of Islam. [36]

Yet the term 'jihadism' remains a controversial term, not least because it is resisted by many Muslims, for whom it unjustly associates the righteous concept of jihad with, in their view, illegitimate violence or terrorism (*irhab*). Meanwhile, the term is more and more accepted in public discourse in the Arab world and, in addition, strongly relates to insiders' labels, which makes it particularly useful for our purpose.

1.3.2 Approaching jihadism

What exactly comprises the jihadist movement is not as evident as the above definition might suggest, however. As we will see throughout the course of this study, the jihadist movement is highly diverse, fluid and dynamic. Its participants have divergent cultural, ethnic, political and socioeconomic backgrounds, and the motivations, interests and aims of its groups and organisations are equally diverse. The difficulty of grasping this hybrid movement can be illustrated by taking a brief look at the ways in which al-Qaeda has been described in current literature.

The name 'al-Qaeda' (*al-qa'ida*), meaning 'the base' in Arabic, was originally used by the mujahidun to refer to their bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1980s. In the course of the 1990s, it also became used for the group or organisation around Bin Laden and, since the 9/11 attacks, it has increasingly become an all-encompassing umbrella term that is employed to describe the entire jihadist movement. This comprehensive understanding of al-Qaeda has become dominant in the years after 9/11, both among jihadists themselves and in Western public discourse.[37] Some scholars too, have followed this inclusive understanding of al-

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[36] It is important to emphasise that I separate jihadism from the concepts of Islamism and political Islam. Islamist groups and organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah combine the waging of jihad with building Islamic (political) institutions. Jihadism can better be seen as part of what Olivier Roy has labelled 'neofundamentalism': a new form of religiosity that is not so much concerned with politics, but rather with personal piety and the re-Islamisation of society. Besides, jihadism should not be equalled with Salafism, as will be elucidated in chapter 3. On political Islam, see Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, transl. Carol Volk (London 1994); Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, transl. Anthony F. Roberts (2002; London 2004). On neofundamentalism, see Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (2002; London 2006).

[37] For a typology of conceptualisations of al-Qaeda in U.S. policy, see Lars Berger, 'Conceptualizing al-Qaeda and US Grand Strategy', in Christina Hellmich and Andreas Behnke (eds.), *Knowing al-Qaeda: The Epistemology of Terrorism* (Farnham 2012) 57-76.

Qaeda. Rohan Gunaratna, for example, has represented al-Qaeda as a 'global network of terror' that consists of cells all over the world that are involved in a single project and bound by shared objectives and motivations.[38] Although he acknowledges that the network has lost its physical infrastructure after 9/11, he still argues that al-Qaeda 'first and foremost, exists as a formal organization with a solid structure', which possesses the operational characteristics of a terrorist organisation.[39]

Other authors have strongly resisted this representation of al-Qaeda. In their view, it oversimplifies the fluid and dynamic movement that has emerged out of the 1980s and mistakenly upholds the idea of a global terrorist organisation that is masterminding plots all over the world.[40] 'This al-Qaeda does not exist', one author stated, because al-Qaeda is no 'coherent and tight-knit organization, with "tentacles everywhere", with a defined ideology and personnel.'[41] Another scholar even introduced the term 'leaderless jihad' to oppose views such as those of Gunaratna.[42] Hence, other ways for understanding al-Qaeda's nature have been suggested: for example, by tracing a transformation from an organisation named 'al-Qaeda' in the pre-9/11 period to a broad, transnational movement in the period thereafter.[43] To grasp its transformation after 9/11, the term 'al-Qaeda 2.0' has been coined, while other authors have proposed to approach the twenty-first century al-Qaeda as a franchise that provides services to groups that are attracted by the 'brand'.[44] Others have called it a 'nebula', thus stressing the movements' amorphous and elusive nature, and still others have entirely abandoned the view of al-Qaeda as a network, movement or organisation and argued that it could be better conceived of as an idea, ideology or state of mind that has served as a source of inspiration for groups and individuals all over the world.[45]

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[38] Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global network of terror* (New York 2002) esp. 3, 5 and 95-101. See Also Talal Asad's criticism of Olivier Roy in *On Suicide Bombing* (New York 2007) 109-10 n.28.

[39] Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg, 'Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33 (2010) 1043-78 at 1044.

[40] Cf. Gilles Kepel, *The War for the Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, transl. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge 2004) 111-2; Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda* (Oxford 2011) 192-193.

[41] Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, 1 and 8.

[42] Cf. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*. That Sageman's somewhat provocative argument did not remain unnoticed by authors at the other side of the spectrum is made clear by Bruce Hoffman, 'The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters', *Foreign Affairs* 87 (2003) 133-8.

[43] For example, Jason Burke (*Al-Qaeda*, 8-14) argues that we should distinguish between three elements: 1) 'al-Qaeda hardcore', consisting of Bin Laden's closest associates who had stayed with him since the late 1980s; 2) a network of co-opted groups which were somehow linked to Bin Laden but should not be imagined as an international network of groups obedient to Bin Laden; 3) an ideology. See also Rabasa, *Beyond al-Qaeda*, 26-33; Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 29-68.

[44] Peter L. Bergen, 'Al Qaeda's New Tactics', *The New York Times*, 15 November 2002; Olivier Roy, 'Al-Qaeda Brand Name Ready for Franchise: The Business of Terror', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1 September 2004; Devji, *Landscapes of Jihad*, 20.

[45] Xavier Raufer, 'Al Qaeda: a Different Diagnosis', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 (2003) 391-8 at 394; Rabasa, *Beyond al-Qaeda*, 73-80; Vertigans, *Militant Islam*, 6; John Turner, 'From Cottage Industry to International Organization: The Evolution of Salafi-Jihadism and the Emergence of the Al Qaeda Ideology', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (2010) 541-58;

This brief excursus about the nature of al-Qaeda demonstrates the difficulty of grasping al-Qaeda and its relation to the jihadist movement. Probably even more interesting, it illustrates a strong urge to define al-Qaeda and jihadism. This becomes understandable when realising that many scholars have (explicitly or implicitly) studied jihadism in view of 'our' (Western) interests, policies and safety, aiming at explaining jihadism in order to counter it.[46] Although this perspective is understandable, it easily leads to the desire to reveal the 'true story' about the adversary – to explain what jihadism really *is*, while questions about the *construction* of the jihadist movement remain largely out of sight. [47]

Instead of exactly defining what jihadism is, this study opts for another strategy, namely by analysing how jihadism is constructed. This implies a significant shift in perspective when compared to current research on jihadism. To quote an author who proposed a comparable shift regarding the studies of social movements: 'what was formerly considered a datum (the existence of the movement) is precisely that which needs to be explained.' Research must tell 'how the actor himself is "constructed."'[48]

In the next chapter, I will further refine my approach to the construction of jihadism by introducing social movement theory. At this point, it is sufficient to say that this study analyses the role that jihadists themselves have played in constructing the jihadist movement or, more precisely, in attracting, binding and mobilising support.[49] For this purpose, it particularly focuses on the role of al-Qaeda in this respect, by which I mean the network around Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri – often dubbed 'al-Qaeda Central' – rather than the various groups and organisations that have also adopted its name since 9/11.[50] Al-Qaeda is a crucial case to examine, not only because it has been a leading player within the jihadist movement over the past two decades, but also because it has played a significant role in publicising and innovatively using suicide attacks: the second central theme of this study.

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[46] This is illustrated by the fact that many publications on jihadism close with a section containing policy recommendations about how to defeat jihadism, such as 'The al-Qaeda Threat and the International Response' (Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*), 'Conclusions and Recommendations' (Rabasa, *Beyond al-Qaeda*), 'Combating Global Islamist Terrorism' (Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*), 'Toward a Strategy' [to defeat al-Qaeda] (Brachman, *Global Jihadism*).

[47] Compare, for example, the subtitle of Burke's highly regarded *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*. See also Christina Hellmich's noteworthy overview of the debate about al-Qaeda in *Al-Qaeda: From Global Network to Local Franchise* (London/New York 2011) 21-60, esp. 58.

[48] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge 1996) 70.

[49] Accordingly, I do not take into account the ways in which other actors (e.g. politicians, media agents, competing movements) have contributed to the (de)construction of jihadism.

[50] Hence, I use the term 'al-Qaeda' in a narrow sense: organisations such as 'al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers' (Iraq) will be denoted by their full names.

1.4 Suicide attacks

1.4.1 Labelling suicide attacks

The modern phenomenon of suicide attacks began in Lebanon in the early 1980s, when Shia organisations pioneered the strategy in their fights against foreign troops that were present in the country during the Lebanese civil war.[51] In the 1990s, the practice was copied by several other organisations in both the Muslim world and beyond. Yet, in the twenty-first century, and particularly since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq of 2001 and 2003, respectively, the numbers of attacks increased dramatically. The hundreds of suicide attacks in the twenty-first century – most of them by jihadists – have caused the death of at least 20.000 people, the majority of them being Afghans, Iraqi and Pakistani.[52]

Suicide attacks are usually defined as attacks whose success is dependent upon the death of the perpetrator.[53] Yet the term 'suicide attacks' and alternatives such as 'suicide bombings', 'suicide operations' and 'suicide missions' are controversial, not in the last place because of their association with suicide.[54] This association is misleading for two reasons. In the first place, several scholars have convincingly argued that the motivations of suicide bombers diverge from 'ordinary' suicides on significant points.[55] In general, suicide bombers do not kill themselves in a spectacular way to escape earthly life. Contrary to popular misconceptions, they are not poor, uneducated or unemployed as compared to their surrounding societies. Although most of them are young, male and Muslim, they do not fit a common profile and are as diverse as the societies they come from. Accordingly, they are motivated by a range of different motivations, such as the experience of a personal crisis, feelings of rejection and humiliation, dedication to a social group and a commitment to a higher cause. In order to comprehend the motivations of individual suicide bombers, they should therefore not be examined through the lens of ordinary

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[51] For references, see Ch. 5.

[52] These numbers are based on my database of suicide attacks carried out in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

[53] I adopt this narrow definition of suicide attacks, which excludes high-risk operations such as the murder of the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam (2004) or the Mumbai attacks (2008). Although the perpetrators of these attacks might have anticipated their death, their death was not a necessary condition for the success of their acts. Cf. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 10-1; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 11; Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 4; Assaf Moghadam, 'Defining Suicide Terrorism', in Ami Pedahzur (ed.), *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (London/New York 2006) 13-24 at 18.

[54] Yet these terms are preferred in this study above terms such as 'human bombs' or 'homicide bombings', because they are far more widely established in scholarly discourse. The term 'martyrdom operations' is only employed when referring to insiders' perspectives.

[55] Cf. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 171-216; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 118-54; Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 27-9. Some of these authors refer to Émile Durkheim's distinction between egoistic and altruistic suicide (cf. *Le Suicide: Étude de Sociologie* (Paris 1897) 174-263). Whereas they refute a comparison between suicide attacks and the former, they see some parallels with the latter.

suicide. Rather, their particular life stories should be studied in their specific contexts.[56]

In the second place, the association of suicide attacks with ordinary suicide is misleading because it is strongly resisted by the perpetrators themselves. Based on early Islamic traditions, Muslims usually regard suicide (*intihar*) as strictly forbidden.[57] Although many Muslims use this as an argument against suicide attacks, the supporters of this form of violence argue that suicide attacks cannot be compared to ordinary suicide. They claim that the attacks should rather be conceived as 'martyrdom operations' (*'amaliyyat istishhadiyya*), a term that is not associated with suicide, but refers to the supreme death by martyrdom (*istishhad*) instead. Hence, the insiders' labels have rather different connotations than the English term suicide. This is important for our purpose, because it already touches upon the meanings that are attributed to suicide attacks by the actors themselves.

1.4.2 Approaching suicide attacks

As we have observed in section 1.2, most scholars have approached suicide attacks in an instrumental manner by viewing them as a tactical means used by organisations to achieve certain strategic aims. Yet, in recent years, scholars have increasingly acknowledged that violence has symbolic aspects as well. Acts of violence are often dramatic events that make symbolic statements, referring to something beyond their immediate target. This is particularly true of religiously motivated violence, which is usually hard to explain by rational choice theories. Instead, acts of religious violence can be better understood by paying attention to what they 'say' about themes such as perceived humiliation, cosmic war and martyrdom, to name just a few prominent examples.[58]

Along these lines, this study examines the symbolic aspects of jihadist suicide attacks. Hence, I will explore the ways in which suicide attacks are orchestrated as theatrical events that, by means of issues such as staging and timing, are designed to draw the attention of and make an impact on the audience. In addition, the focus on the symbolic aspects also enables us to explore an entirely new way of looking at suicide attacks: not as utilitarian actions, but as meaningful social practices. As several scholars have argued, we can make an analytical distinction between instrumental and expressive aspects of violence.[59] Whereas the former is related to

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[56] Cf. Jan N. Bremmer, 'The motivation of martyrs: Perpetua and the Palestinians' in Brigitte Luchesi and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs* (Berlin 2004) 535-54 at 548-50; Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 1-4; Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, 39-64; Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 3-34.

[57] Although the Quran is not completely unambiguous, texts such as Q. 4:29 are interpreted as forbidding suicide. Moreover, according to several *hadiths*, the Prophet strongly condemned suicide. For references, see F. Rosenthal, 'Intihār', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden 2010) at www.referenceworks.brillonline.com, last accessed June 2013.

[58] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (2000; Berkeley 2003) esp. 124-8; James W. Jones, *Blood that Cries out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* (Oxford 2008) esp. 56-61.

[59] Cf. David Riches, 'The Phenomenon of Violence', in Idem (ed.) *The Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford 1986) 1-27 at 4-5; Anton Blok, 'The Meaning of "Senseless" Violence' (1991), in Idem, *Honour and Violence* (Cambridge 2001) 103-14; Ingo W. Schröder and Bettina E. Schmidt,

the utilitarian use of violence, the relation between means and ends, the latter has to do with the meanings of violence: what does it 'say' or express?[60] As current research on suicide attacks clearly illustrates, we are usually mainly interested in the instrumental aspects of violence, and thus try to explain it by focusing on its rationality and functional use.[61] Yet, as social actions, acts of violence always contain expressive aspects too: they express a relationship with others, entail ideas about legitimacy and cultural values, and presuppose certain images of the perpetrator's own community as well as the enemy.[62] For that reason, each act of violence has something to 'say' and communicates ideas like these to the audience that directly or indirectly witnesses the violence. Violence can thus be considered, in the terms of cultural anthropologist Anton Blok, 'primarily as social symbolic activity, as meaningful social action.' Hence, Blok argues, research should start with 'exploring meaning, interpreting symbolic action, and mapping the historical and social context of the activities defined as violent.'[63] In order to accomplish this, he indicates, it is highly important to pay attention to the way in which the violence is carried out. Cases of expressive violence are usually strongly ritualised, and studying the form of violence is therefore crucial to understand its meanings for the people involved.

This study adopts this 'cultural approach to violence' as developed by Blok and others. Accordingly, in addition to scrutinising the orchestration of suicide attacks as dramatic events, I will particularly focus on their expressive aspects and on the social meanings for their participants.

'Introduction: Violent Imaginaries and Violent Practices', in Eidem (eds.), *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (London 2001) 1-24 at 3-6.

[60] Some acts of violence may be more instrumental, while others, like strongly ritualised forms of violence such as bullfights, duelling and public executions, are more expressive. Yet less obviously ritualised cases of violence, such as riots, may have strong expressive aspects as well, as is argued in Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Rites of Violence' (1973), in Idem, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London 1975) 152-187.

[61] Cf. Blok, 'The Meaning of "Senseless" Violence', 103-4. Blok argues that violence is too often approached from a functional or utilitarian perspective. The expression 'meaningless violence' illustrates this perspective, he says, for violence always contains symbolic meanings and therefore can only be considered 'meaningless' when focusing on its instrumental aspects.

[62] That violence always implies ideas about legitimacy can be illustrated by the definition of violence by the anthropologist David Riches ('The phenomenon of violence', 8): violence is 'an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses.' These ideas are strongly informed by culture and reflect ideas about the past, the community and collective norms, as follows from Weber's classical definition of legitimacy, which says that legitimacy is largely based upon historicity and thus upon (collective) experiences from and representations of the past. Violence of the past is often remembered and relived by cultural symbols like stories, rituals or memorials and thereby influences ideas about the legitimacy of future violence. Cf. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (1921-1922; Tübingen 1972) 19.

[63] Blok, 'The Meaning of "Senseless" Violence', 113.

1.5 Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos

1.5.1 Al-Sahab

The main sources that are used for this purpose are jihadist media releases, and in particular the videos that have been produced by al-Qaeda's media group al-Sahab ('The Clouds'). Al-Sahab Establishment for Media Production (*mu'assasa al-sahab li-l-intaj al-i'lami*), as its full name sounds, was established by al-Qaeda in late 2000 or early 2001 to produce, coordinate and distribute its media releases.[64] It was an important part of Bin Laden's organisation from its onset, as becomes evident from the fact that it was initially managed by one of al-Qaeda's most distinguished leaders, the Kuwaiti Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (b. 1965).[65] Although the war in Afghanistan that followed the 9/11 attacks forced it to operate clandestinely, its operatives have remained in direct contact with al-Qaeda's leadership.[66] Al-Sahab remained the sole media outlet for the statements of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri as well as other al-Qaeda leaders, such as Abu Layth al-Libi (1967-2008), Abu Yahya al-Libi (1963-2012), Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (1955-2010) and the American convert Adam Gadahn, a.k.a. Azzam al-Amriki (b. 1978).[67] Moreover, due to the loss of al-Qaeda's physical

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[64] The name al-Sahab is probably derived from one of the epithets of God: 'Mover of the clouds' (*mujri al-sahab*). This epithet can be found in a *hadith* that recounts a night prayer of the Prophet during one of his battles, in which he said: 'O God, Revealer of the Book, Mover of the clouds and Defeater of the confederates, defeat them and grant us victory over them' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 4.52.2661). This invocation frequently returns in al-Qaeda's statements and seems to have been one of Bin Laden's favourites, which increases the plausibility of the accounts that he himself invented the name of the media production group. Cf. Thomas Hegghammer, 'Why Is al-Sahab Called al-Sahab?', 15 June 2009 at www.jihadica.com, last accessed April 2013.

[65] After his capture and his subsequent imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay in 2003, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed would declare that he had been the 'media operations director' directly under al-Zawahiri. Cf. Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024, 10 March 2007, at www.globalsecurity.org, last accessed May 2011. See also JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment, ISN US9KU-010024DP, 8 December 2006, 4 and 13, at www.wikileaks.ch, last accessed May 2011.

[66] Al-Sahab recorded the statements of al-Qaeda's leaders, after which the production of the videos took place somewhere else, possibly in minivans, as a former cameraman of al-Sahab once declared. Via a chain of couriers, the videos were subsequently brought to their final destination, which was, until 2004, usually the Al Jazeera office in Islamabad. Here, the videos were dropped anonymously, after which they were often (partially) broadcast by the Qatari satellite channel. On the accounts of the former cameraman, see Kathy Gannon, 'A Date with the Emir of al-Qaeda', *The Standard*, 23 June 2006; Eadem, 'Cameraman Sheds Light on al-Qaeda Videos', *The Washington Post*, 25 June 2006. On the courier system, see Sohail Abdul Nasir, 'Al-Qaeda's Clandestine Courier Service', *Terrorism Focus* 3, 21 February 2006, available at www.jamestown.org, last accessed January 2014. On the role of Al Jazeera, see Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that is Challenging the West* (New York 2005) 126-9.

[67] Gadahn's remarkable life story had led him from American counterculture and the Californian heavy metal scene to the mujahidun in Afghanistan, where he eventually became a major spokesman in al-Sahab's (English language) videos. On his noteworthy biography, see Annette Stark, 'Peace, Love, Death Metal', *Los Angeles City Beat*, 9 September 2004; Eadem, 'Threats, Lies, and Videotape', *Los Angeles City Beat*, 4 November 2004; Raffi Khatchadourian, 'Azzam the American: The Making of an al-Qaeda Homegrown', *The New Yorker*, 22 January 2007.

bases and the dispersion of its network, these leaders had to rely increasingly on their media activities, as a result of which al-Sahab's importance grew even more.[68] The numbers of its releases strongly increased, from four in 2001 to almost one hundred in 2007. Furthermore, its audience multiplied, especially in the cases of Bin Laden's well-known video and audio messages in the years after 9/11.[69]

Yet, in the footsteps of these messages, another genre of videos that had been developed by al-Sahab also became increasingly popular: martyrdom videos. It is these videos, which consist of extensive, documentary-like productions about one or more suicide bombers and/or attacks, that constitute the main source for this research.[70]

1.5.2 Martyrdom videos

Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos are among its most extensive and professionalised releases. They typically start with an intro containing al-Sahab's Al Jazeera-like logo and the title of the release, after which an introduction follows in which the jihadist battle is explained. In these introductions, an al-Qaeda leader or anonymous voice-over illuminates the conflict between jihadism and its enemies, usually supported by footage which is derived from all kinds of sources, including mainstream media channels such as CNN, the BBC, Al Jazeera and al-'Arabiyya. Then, the videos introduce the suicide bomber, often by means of a biography or eulogy that is presented by one of his – the videos feature male bombers only – superiors or peers. Subsequently, the core of the video follows: the suicide bomber's farewell message. In these messages, the men usually explain their mission and directly address their viewers to convince them of the righteousness of the cause that they are willing to die for. Finally, the videos narrate or depict the suicide attack itself either by real-life footage or a computer simulation, after which they close with a standardised title sequence.

Yet these are merely the general patterns. The individual videos often deviate from this model, for instance by omitting the introduction, biography or video testament, or by presenting them in a different order. Moreover, the videos have a far more dynamic character than the above summary suggests, since the different elements are frequently interspersed with short clips, Quran recitations and *nashids*.[71] In addition, the videos often contain brief statements by celebrated jihadists as well as real-life footage showing the men during training. All these

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[68] This becomes evident also from the fact that significant al-Qaeda operatives such as Ramzi bin al-Shibh (b. 1972), a former member of the so-called 'Hamburg cell' and close associate of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, contributed to al-Sahab's videos after 9/11. Cf. Fouda, *Masterminds of Terror*.

[69] Cf. Craig Whitlock, 'Hearts and Minds: Power of "the Clouds": Al-Qaeda's Growing Online Offensive', *The Washington Post*, 24 June 2008; Intelcenter, 'Al-Qaeda Messaging Statistics, v3.3', 9 September 2007, 20, at www.intelcenter.com, last accessed 22 May 2011.

[70] Usually, martyrdom videos are (quite validly) more broadly defined by including all 'martyrs' instead of suicide bombers alone. Since suicide attacks are the main focus of this study, I use the term to denote videos including suicide bombers and/or attacks only.

[71] *Nashids* (sg. *nashid*) are pieces of a capella vocal music or hymns with a religious content, in al-Sahab's videos usually about jihad and martyrdom.

elements are sophisticatedly edited together by means of text-banners, animations and voice-overs, producing rather professional 'documentaries' about jihadist suicide attacks.

These videos provide an excellent source to study al-Qaeda's suicide attacks. They give insights into the meanings that both the organisers and perpetrators of the attacks have given to their violence – explicitly, but also in more implicit ways. Besides, as the videos embed the attacks in lengthy narratives about the jihadist movement and its enemies, they provide a comprehensive view of al-Qaeda's portrayal of the jihadist movement. Moreover, they do not only elucidate how jihadists perceived their movement, but also how al-Qaeda has participated in its construction by attempting to convince (potential) supporters of its views. The videos are not so much aimed at convincing opponents or at converting perceived unbelievers, but rather at attracting, binding and mobilising the so-called 'Islamic youths' (*al-shabab al-islami*). It is these (potential) supporters who are the target audience of the videos: young Muslims, both in the Muslim world and in the West, who are interested in or who already joined the jihadist struggle. They are – implicitly and explicitly – called upon to wage jihad and search for martyrdom in the way of God.

There are two additional reasons why al-Sahab's martyrdom videos are a fruitful source to examine. Firstly, despite the importance of both al-Qaeda and al-Sahab within the larger jihadist movement, al-Sahab and its videos have been barely studied until now. Research on jihadist media in general is only in its infancy. Most studies on this topic are based upon large databases and present broad overviews of the development, contents and functions of jihadist media.[72] More in-depth qualitative studies are rather scarce, whereas al-Sahab and the genre of martyrdom

[72] Leading in this respect have been studies by government institutes and scholars of terrorism, such as the Transnational Radical Islamism Project (TERRA) of the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), which has published several wide-ranging reports about jihadists' Internet use and video productions. Cf. Hanna Rogan, 'Jihadism Online: A Study of How al-Qaida and Radical Islamist Groups Use the Internet for Terrorist Purposes', FFI-rapport 2006/00915, 20 March 2006; Eadem, 'al-Qaeda's Online Media Strategies: From *Abu Reuter* to *Irhabi 007*', FFI-rapport 2007/02729, 1 December 2007; Cecilie Finsnes, 'What is Audio-Visual Jihadi Propaganda? An Overview of the Content of FFI's Jihadi Video Database', FFI-rapport 2010/00960, 26 March 2010. For other examples, see Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington 2006); Wael Adhami, 'The Strategic Importance of the Internet for Armed Insurgent Groups in Modern Warfare', *International Review of the Red Cross* 89 (2007) 857-78; Christopher M. Blanchard, 'Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology', Congressional Research Service: Report for Congress, 9 July 2007; Daniel Kimmage, 'The Al-Qaeda's Media Nexus. The Virtual Network Behind the Global Message', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Special Report, March 2008; Arab Salem, Edna Reid and Hsinchun Chen, 'Multimedia Content Coding and Analysis: Unravelling the Content of *Jihadi* Extremist Groups' Videos', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (2008) 605-26; Edna Reid et al., 'Collecting and Analyzing the Presence of Terrorists on the Web: A Case Study of Jihad Websites', paper at http://ai.arizona.edu, last accessed March 2011. Finally, see also the reports and articles by institutes and analysts such as the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point (www.ctc.usma.edu), Intelcenter (www.intelcenter.com), the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (www.ict.org.il), The Jamestown Foundation (www.jamestown.org), the Jawa Report (www.mypetjawa.mu.nu), Laura Mansfield (www.lauramansfield.com) and the SITE Intelligence Group (www.siteintelgroup.org), last accessed March 2011.

videos have hardly been subject of scholarly study at all.[73] By disclosing these sources, this study can therefore add something to our understanding of jihadism in general and al-Qaeda and al-Sahab in particular.

Secondly, al-Sahab's martyrdom videos have been among the most important and trendsetting media releases by jihadists in the twenty-first century. The new genre that al-Sahab created has been copied by organisations from Algeria to Iraq and from Somalia to Syria. Hence, because of al-Qaeda and al-Sahab's pioneering role in the jihadist movement, the patterns identified in this study also tell us something about other jihadist media producers and, therefore, groups and organisations. Moreover, the videos have been highly influential among the consumers of jihadist media. Although the evidence is only anecdotal, there are many cases indicating that al-Sahab's videos have an impact on its viewers.[74] I therefore presume that the meanings ascribed to jihadism and jihadist suicide attacks in these widespread videos are at least partially shared by jihadists in other places over the world.

For the above reasons, al-Sahab's martyrdom videos form the main sources for this study. I have concentrated on the martyrdom videos that have been released before 2009: seventeen releases with a total length of more than seventeen hours (see appendix I). These videos discuss suicide attacks that have been carried out in several regions, both in the West (the U.S. and the U.K.) and in the Muslim world (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen). Most of these were high-profile

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[73] For some notable exceptions concerning jihadist media usage and releases, see Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London 2003); Yassin Musharbash, *Die neue al-Qaida: Innenansichten eines lernenden Terrornetzwerks* (Cologne 2006); Joas Wagemakers, 'Al-Qa'ida's Editor: Abu Jandal al-Azdi's Online Jihadi Activism', *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 12 (2011) 355-69; Rüdiger Lohlker (ed.), *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline* (Göttingen 2012). For a thorough introduction to Bin Laden's media appearances, see Bruce Lawrence, 'Introduction', in Idem (ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London 2005) xi-iii. For a notable exception concerning martyrdom videos, see Mohammed M. Hafez, 'Martyrdom Mythology in Iraq: How Jihadists Frame Suicide Terrorism in Videos and Biographies', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (2007) 95-116. Literature on al-Sahab is limited to some articles by journalists and occasional references in counter-terrorism reports and academic studies, see Rogan, 'al-Qaeda's Online Media Strategies, 48-56; Kimmage, 'The Al-Qaeda's Media Nexus'; Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 147; Finsnes, 'What is Audio-Visual Jihadi Propaganda?', 15-6; Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 131-3; Carl L. Ciovacco, 'The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (2009) 853-75.

[74] Although the reception of jihadist media requires another kind of research, the number of cases that indicate that videos have an impact on the young jihadists watching them is overwhelming. Some well-documented cases are the British student Roshonara Choudry (cf. Vikram Dodd, 'Roshonara Choudry: I Wanted to Die... I Wanted to Be a Martyr, *The Guardian*, 4 November 2010, at www.guardian.co.uk), the Somali-American student Mohamed Mohamud (cf. Kambiz Ghaneabassiri, 'For God or for Fame? The Making of a Teenage Bomber', 9 December 2010, at www.religiondispatches.org), the Palestinian Mohammed Sadiq Odeh (cf. Bergen, *Bin Laden*, 138-9), the Tunisian-Belgian Abdessater Dahmane (cf. Ibidem, 258-9) and the Dutch Samir Azzouz (cf. Pieter Nanninga, 'Allah en ik tegen de rest: De jihad van een Amsterdamse tiener', in Justin E.A. Kroesen, Yme B. Kuiper and Pieter Nanninga (eds.), *Religie en cultuur in hedendaags Nederland* (Assen 2010) 69-75.) See also Weimann, *Terror on the Internet*, 44-7; Gary R. Bunt, *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Chapel Hill 2009) 186-7; Diana Rieger, Lena Frischlich and Gary Bente, *Propaganda 2.0: Psychological Effects of Right-Wing and Islamic Extremist Internet Videos* (Cologne 2013).

attacks by al-Qaeda, such as the USS Cole bombing in the port of Aden, Yemen, in 2000, the 9/11 attacks, the 2003 Muhaya Compound bombings in Saudi Arabia and the 2005 London bombings. The videos also include less eye-catching attacks, and, in one particular case, we are not even sure to which attack the video refers. Furthermore, the videos feature suicide bombers from Afghanistan, Central Asian republics, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UK. Although the degree of al-Qaeda's involvement is not entirely clear in each of the featured attacks (see Ch. 7.1.2), the martyrdom videos do cover a wide area of al-Qaeda's violence.

1.6 Argument and overview of this study

As we have seen, jihadism and suicide attacks have been studied mainly from policy and security perspectives. This study takes a cultural approach instead, which means that 1) concerning jihadism, it analyses how jihadists have constructed their movement, rather than explaining it by following a fixed, pre-determined definition and 2) concerning suicide attacks, it focuses on their symbolic aspects, more than their instrumental, tactical and strategic uses. Taking these two themes together, this study argues that suicide attacks, as a symbolic form of violence, are crucial for jihadists to construct their movement. By focusing on al-Qaeda, it will show that suicide attacks are essential to publicise jihadism and therefore to attract, bind and mobilise support.

After elucidating my approach in the next chapter, this argument will be developed in three steps. Part II embeds jihadism, al-Qaeda and al-Sahab in social movement theory. Chapter 3 argues that, due to the diversity of the movement's participants, fostering a sense of solidarity is one of the jihadists' main concerns. Whereas jihadist thought is potentially suitable for this purpose, jihadists have largely lacked the resources and opportunities to bring their message to the fore. As a result, they have resorted to unconventional means to publicise their cause. Chapter 4 argues that jihadists' media usage has been important in this respect. As a result of their extensive and creative media usage, jihadism and media have become strongly intertwined and co-evolving, which underlines the significance of al-Sahab for the construction of the jihadist movement.

Jihadist media has become particularly important in combination with violence. Part III focuses on jihadist suicide attacks, arguing that they have been crucial for jihadists to reach their audience and explain to them what jihadism is about. By approaching suicide attacks as performances, chapter 5 analyses how al-Qaeda has orchestrated its violence to draw attention to the jihadist movement and make an impact on the audience. Chapter 6 focuses on the meanings of the performances for their perpetrators: the suicide bombers. By examining the particular form of the violence, it discusses what the violence 'says' or communicates. Together, these chapters show that suicide attacks are not primarily used in tactical and strategic ways, but rather express some of the central themes of the jihadist movement and show the audience what jihadism is about.

Part IV concentrates on al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. Whereas the videos occasionally turn up in the third part of the book, for which they have been used as a source to study suicide attacks, this part explores how al-Sahab and, thus, al-Qaeda's

leaders have represented the performances in their media releases. Chapter 7 focuses on al-Sahab's diagnosis of the current situation in the Muslim world, chapter 8 on its suggested solution, i.e. suicide attacks, and chapter 9 on its attempts to mobilise its audience. Together, these chapters examine the role of suicide attacks in al-Sahab's efforts to convince its viewers of its cause. In addition, they discuss the more implicit meanings given to the violence in the videos. This demonstrates that suicide attacks represent the jihadist movement's core symbols, narratives, values, beliefs and practices, and meanwhile challenge those of others. Consequently, by establishing boundaries between jihadism and its opponents, suicide bombers can be considered living definitions of the jihadist movement, who display for others what jihadism is about. In this capacity, this study concludes, suicide bombers are crucial for attracting, binding and mobilising jihadists.

2 Conceptual framework

This chapter introduces social movement theory as a general framework to study the jihadist movement and its actions. Social movement theory has been developed to explain the emergence and transformation of social movements and offers conceptual tools to explore the role of collective actions and media therein. It is therefore highly suitable for studying jihadism, suicide attacks and martyrdom videos.[1]

The chapter starts with a general overview of social movement theory, in which I will pay particular attention to the role of culture, religion, identity and media in the construction of social movements (2.1). Subsequently, it addresses the role of collective actions in the construction of social movements. For this purpose, the concept of performance is introduced as a tool to analyse the specific form of action that is central to this study: suicide attacks (2.2). Finally, the chapter examines the concept of framing, which facilitates the analysis of social movements' attempts to attract, bind and mobilise their supporters, and therefore provides a useful tool for studying al-Sahab's media releases (2.3). These three sections run parallel to the three parts of this book, focusing on the movement, its public actions and its media releases, respectively.

2.1 Social movement theory

2.1.1 New social movements

Social movement theory, which is, in fact, a conceptual framework more than a comprehensive theory, has been developed as an alternative for crises theories and strain arguments to explain the rise and development of social movements.[2] Until the 1960s, social movements had been mainly explained by focusing on their reactive

[1] That social movement theory can be fruitfully applied to study jihadist suicide attacks is convincingly shown in Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*.

[2] According to Sidney Tarrow's classical definition, social movements are 'collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities'. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge 1994) 3-4. For other important contributions to social movement theory, see Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *International Social Movement Research 1: From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research across Cultures* (Greenwich 1988); Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (1999; Malden 2006); Doug McAdams, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge 2001); William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge 2002); Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg (eds.), *Methods of Social Movement Research* (Minneapolis 2002).

nature in situations of (perceived) crises, relative deprivation and shared grievances. Subsequently, under the umbrella of social movement theory, scholars have started to emphasise the movements' agency by studying their collective actions as rational and strategic choices in specific situations. The concept of resource mobilisation was introduced to explore how movements use available resources such as social networks, institutions and cultural and ideological symbols, and the concept of political opportunities to address how they deal with external factors such as access to power.[3]

Initially, social movement theorists predominantly studied Western, secular movements that struggled for political power and/or economic redistribution, such as European working-class movements. More recently, however, the character of the movements under review has changed. Heterogeneous movements focusing on issues such as human rights, global justice and ecology have increasingly been taken into account, and the same is true for transnational, non-Western and religious movements.[4] Along these lines, scholars have also started to pay more attention to Muslim movements, and in particular to Islamism, Salafism and jihadism.[5]

These more recent movements under scrutiny have a rather different character than the Western, secular movements that were studied before. Some authors even prefer to speak about 'new social movements' in order to deal with movements such as anti-globalism and environmentalism.[6] In contrast with the more homogeneous and centralised Western movements of the first part of the twentieth century, these movements are not so much class-based, but socially differentiated, the authors argue. Moreover, they are less formally organised, consisting of loose networks that

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[3] Cf. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 17-8 and 33.

[4] Cf. Donatella Della Porta, Hanspeter Kriesi and Dieter Rucht, *Social Movements in a Globalizing World* (Basingstoke etc. 1999); Paul Lubeck, 'The Islamic Revival: Antinomies of the Islamic Movements under Globalization', in Robin Cohen and Shirin Rai (eds.), *Global Social Movements* (New Brunswick 2000) 146-64; Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory* (Bloomington 2004); Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge 2005).

[5] Cf. Asef Bayat, 'Islamism and Social Movement Theory', *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005) 891-908; David Leheny, 'Terrorism, Social Movements, and International Security: How Al Qaeda Affects Southeast Asia', *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 6 (2005) 87-109; Roel Meijer, 'Taking the Islamist Movement Seriously: Social Movement Theory and the Islamist Movement', *International Review of Social History* 50 (2005) 279-92; Quintan Wiktorowitcz, 'The Salafi Movement: Violence and Fragmentation of Community', in Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds.), *Muslim Networks: From Hajj to Hip-Hop* (Chapel Hill/London 2005) 208-33; Phillip Sutton and Stephen Vertigans, 'Islamic "New Social Movements"? Radical Islam, al-Qa'ida and Social Movement Theory', *Mobilization* 11 (2006) 101-15; Colin J. Beck, 'The Contribution of Social Movement Theory to Understanding Terrorism', *Sociology Compass* 2 (2008) 1565-81; Thomas Olesen, 'Social Movement Theory and Radical Islamic Activism', Center for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation, Aarhus University, May 2009, available at www.ps.au.dk, last accessed November 2011.

[6] Cf. Alberto Melucci, 'The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach', *Social Science Information* 19 (1980) 199-226; Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston and Joseph R. Gusfield (eds.), *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia 1994); Steven M. Buechler, 'New Social Movement Theories', *Sociological Quarterly* 36 (1995) 441-64; Nelson A. Pichardo, 'New Social Movements: A Critical Review', *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997) 411-30.

are dynamic, decentralised and anti-hierarchic.[7] Furthermore, new social movements do not primarily strive for political power and material resources, as did their predecessors. Rather, they are engaged in what has been called 'post-industrial politics', and thus emphasise post-material values and goals instead of maximising power.[8] Taken together, these characteristics have led to a redefinition of a social movement as 'a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity.'[9]

This redefinition of social movements brings it more in line with our subject. As will be further explored in the next chapter, jihadism is diverse, dynamic, decentralised and focused on post-material values and goals, and therefore shares many characteristics with new social movements. Additionally, the emphasis on the importance of collective actions for the emergence and development of social movements perfectly corresponds with our focus on the role of violence and media releases in the construction of jihadism. Finally, whereas the role of culture and religion initially played only a secondary role within social movement theory, the rise of new social movements has led to an increasing acknowledgement of their significance.

2.1.2 Social movements, culture and identity

In recent years, the issues of culture, religion and identity have become a key focus in social movement research, as the above definition of new social movements illustrates.[10] Because of the heterogeneity of recent social movements, it is argued, it has become increasingly crucial for social movements to create a sense of solidarity among its participants or to construct, as it has been labelled, a collective identity.

Whereas the term 'collective identity' might suggest an idea of permanence of the collective, perceiving it as a fixed subject over time and place, we should avoid a monolithic view on social movements. As cultural sociologist Alberto Melucci has argued, we should focus on 'the processes through which a collective becomes a collective.' Hence, we should adopt a processual approach to the collective identity of social movements, conceiving it as a process of constant negotiations between individuals and groups, who together produce 'an interactive and shared definition (…) concerning the orientation of their action.'[11] In this process of negotiations, the demarcation of the movement from others occupies a central place. The construction

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[7] Buechler, 'New Social Movement Theories', 453-6; Bayat, 'Islamism and Social Movement Theory'.

[8] Buechler, 'New Social Movement Theories', 442; Sutton, 'Islamic "New Social Movements"?, 102.

[9] Mario Diani, 'The Concept of Social Movement', *The Sociological Review* 40 (1992) 1-25 at 13.

[10] See also Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 'The Cultural Analysis of Social Movements', in Eidem (eds.), *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis 1995) 2-24.

[11] To provide Melucci's full definition of collective identity (*Challenging Codes*, 70): 'Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the orientations of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place.'

of a 'self' always excludes others; selfing always implies othering.[12] Therefore, the construction of boundaries (who is incorporated and who is excluded) is crucial in the construction of social movements. Although these boundaries may be perceived as natural and fixed, it is important to realise that they are, in fact, constantly shifting. How social movements define themselves and, hence, who are excluded is subject to continuous negotiation and contestation and strongly dependent on the context of the perceiver.

As research on contemporary social movements has learned, culture is central to these processes negotiation. For examining the role of culture, social movements scholars have embraced a useful metaphor that has been developed by Ann Swidler, who proposed to conceive culture as a 'tool kit' of rituals, symbols, stories and guides to actions from which people can select (assemblages of) elements for shaping their behaviour.[13] Thus, rather than perceiving culture as something people merely live in, this metaphor perceives culture as something *to be used*. It shifts the attention to the ways in which people actively and creatively use their cultural repertoire to shape their actions. This 'tool kit' should not be seen as static. Rather, it is flexible and dynamic, since the content of the tool kit changes over time. Moreover, the tools carry different meanings in different contexts, and since these contexts are ever changing, rituals, symbols, stories and guidelines for action never reappear in exactly the same way.

Applied to social movements, this indicates that cultures provide resources for shaping a sense of solidarity among the participants. Particularly religious traditions can be significant in this respect, since they offer 'ready ready-made symbols, rituals and solidarities that can be accessed and appropriated by movement leaders' in constructing their movement.[14] This is especially true for contemporary religious traditions, since religion has increasingly become a 'free-floating phenomenon'. While established religious institutions were able to authorise religious beliefs and practices to a large extent in the past, religious symbols, meanings, and values have now increasingly become 'deregulated'. As a consequence, religious symbols and meanings have become more and more available for use in a bewildering variety of ways.[15] Social movement leaders can profit from this development, because they are increasingly able to appropriate and reshape religious symbols and meanings for their own purposes.

To provide a suitable example, social movement leaders may appropriate certain religious symbols referring to a perceived glorious and 'pure' period from the past and present their movement as a restoration of this period. Accordingly, they may represent their movements as in line with the 'essence' of their religion in order

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[12] For a fruitful approach to study processes of selfing and othering, see Gerd Baumann, 'Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach', in Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich (eds.), *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A structural approach* (New York/Oxford 2005) 18-50.

[13] Ann Swidler, 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986) 273-86 at 277.

[14] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (1994; Cambridge 1998) 112.

[15] James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge 2003) 1-29 and 164-7. See also Idem, 'The Politics of Defining Religion in Secular Society: From a Taken-for-granted Institution to a Contested Resource', in Johannes G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (Leiden 1999) 23-40.

to provide authority to their views.[16] Essentialist perspectives like these are understandable, because they offer clear-cut images of reality, construct and empower collective identifications and enable leaders to justify their actions by claiming a direct continuity with a glorified past. In the meantime, we should recognise that cultures and religions are not as static and reified as they are sometimes presented. As noticed above, cultural tools never repeat themselves in exactly the same way. Moreover, by claiming a revival of an imagined golden period from the past, the leaders may actually (attempt to) authorise new practices or beliefs. Invoking traditions and symbols from the past becomes a vehicle for change, and, as a result, expressions of essentialist perspectives like these are actually part of the (re)construction of culture and religion.[17] Hence, according to this processual perspective on culture, social movements are not only shaped by culture, but they also (re)produce it.[18]

Applied to our subject, the above means that in our study of the construction of jihadism, the exploration of the creation of a sense of solidarity among jihadists should play a pivotal role. To accomplish this, we will scrutinise processes of boundary construction as well as selfing and othering. Jihadists' use of their cultural and, particularly, religious repertoire might be expected to be significant in this respect, and therefore we will pay attention to the ways in which Muslim symbols and values are appropriated and reshaped, and how essentialist perspectives are invoked to authorise al-Qaeda's and al-Sahab's views on the jihadist movement and its innovative practices.

Before turning to our approach to these practices, it is necessary first to address another theme that, in addition to culture and religion, has proven to be crucial for the construction of recent social movements: media.

2.1.3 Social movements and media

Media technologies have changed rapidly over the past decades. Traditional 'mass media' such as newspapers, radio and television have been supplemented by so-called 'small media', 'new media' and 'social media'. Technological innovations have led to the use of audio- and videocassettes, DVDs and particularly the World Wide Web, the latter of which further developed into what has been called 'Web 2.0'.[19] These transformations in the media sphere have facilitated and accelerated several societal changes. For example, due to the interactive and transnational character of 'new media', the boundaries between media producers and consumers, public and private, and local and global have increasingly blurred. Transnational media such as

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[16] For examples from the Muslim tradition, see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (1996; Princeton 2004) 22-45.

[17] Cf. Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities* (New York 1999) 91-2.

[18] Cf. Alberto Melucci, 'Getting Involved: Identity and Mobilization in Social Movements', in Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures* 1 (Greenwich/London 1988) 329-48.

[19] Although these various stages and media forms can be separated for analytical purposes, their differences should not be taken too strictly. Moerover, the interrelatedness of and continuities between them are often more interesting than their differences.

satellite stations and the Internet have linked different public spheres, making them a contested terrain for various publics and a marketplace for ideas, identities and discourses.[20] Moreover, new voices have been able to attract new audiences, especially in regions where the mass media were traditionally under state control.[21]

These developments have offered social movements novel opportunities to attract, bind and mobilise support. Especially for movements that lack strong material resources and have only limited political opportunities, media representations are of crucial importance. Mass media may help movements to gain attention, which can be a relatively easy way to signal messages to the audience.[22] Yet, since mass media are not always sympathetic to their cause, many movements have also actively employed the opportunities provided by new, relatively cheap and accessible information and communication technologies; not only for internal communication, but also to represent themselves to their publics. The use of media has thus become an integral part of the ways in which most social movements operate, and therefore the changes in the media landscapes over the last few decades are essential to understand the development of contemporary social movements.[23]

The interrelatedness of media and social movements can be elucidated by means of the concept of mediatisation. Mediatisation broadly refers to 'the historical developments that took and take place as a result of change in (communication) media and the consequences of those changes.'[24] Not to be confused with 'mediation' (i.e. communication via a medium), mediatisation refers to more general societal and cultural changes in contemporary societies and the role of media technologies, institutions and practices in these transformations.[25] Hence, mediatisation is often taken alongside meta-processes such as globalisation and individualisation.[26] In recent years, it has been employed on different levels, for example to grasp the relationship between media and politics, culture and religion, but also to study the role of media in, among others, conflicts and rituals.[27] Along these lines, we can also think of contemporary social movements as mediatised movements.

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[20] Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in Idem (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World: the Emerging Public Sphere* (1999; Bloomington 2003) ix–xv at xii.

[21] Cf. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 'Redefining Muslim Publics', in Idem (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World*, 1-18; Jon W. Anderson, 'New Media, New Publics: Reconfiguring the Public Sphere of Islam', *Social Research* 70 (2003) 887-908.

[22] Cf. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 127.

[23] For the importance of media for social movements, see Wiliam A. Gamson, 'Movements and Media as Interacting Systems', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (1993) 114-25; Wim van de Donk et al., 'Introduction: Social Movements and ICTs', in Eidem (eds.), *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements* (London/New York 2004) 1-21; Brian D. Loader, 'Social Movements and New Media', *Sociology Compass* 2 (2008) 1920-33.

[24] Friedrich Krotz, 'Media Connectivity: Concepts, Conditions and Consequences', in Andreas Hepp, Friedrich Krotz and Shaun Moores (eds.), *Network, Connectivity and Flow*: *Key Concepts for Media and Cultural Studies* (New York 2008) 13-31 at 23.

[25] Knut Lundby, 'Introduction: "Mediatization" as Key', in Idem (ed.), *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (New York 2009) 1-18 at 1-4.

[26] Cf. Friedrich Krotz, 'Mediatization: A Concept with which to Grasp Media and Societal Change', in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (New York 2009) 21-40 at 24-5.

[27] Simon Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Winfried Schulz, '"Mediatization" of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?', *Political Communication* 16 (1999) 247-261; Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*

Admittedly, the concept of mediatisation might run the danger of upholding an essentialist perspective on media by emphasising a one-dimensional process of 'the media' affecting societies, cultures, religions, etc. Yet media are not a separate, transhistorical realm that simply imposes a so-called 'media logic' upon other spheres in society.[28] They do not have agency; humans have, and therefore we should not focus our research on 'the media' and its effects, but rather on the ways in which agents have used media technologies in their specific contexts.[29] Along these lines, it has been convincingly argued that media do not merely impact societies, cultures, religions, politics, etc., but that media have become an integral part of people's lives and that media and societies are strongly interrelated and co-evolving.[30]

Thus, whereas the concept of mediatisation can be applied to grasp the relationship between contemporary social movements and media, it should not simply be asked how new information and communication technologies have impacted movements. Rather, it should be explored how social movements have employed media in their specific historical, social and cultural contexts and, accordingly, how both have been co-evolving.[31] These remarks should be kept in mind when exploring the construction of jihadism and the role of media, and in particular al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, therein.

(Maidenhead 2006); Idem, 'Mediatized Rituals: Beyond Manufacturing Consent', *Media, Culture and Society* 28 (2006) 411-32; Stig Hjarvard, 'The Mediatization of Religion. A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change', *Northern Lights* 6 (2008) 9-26. For theoretical discussions of the concept, see Winfried Schultz, 'Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept', *European Journal of Communication* 19 (2004) 87-101; Knut Lundby (ed.), *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (New York 2006); Friedrich Krotz, *Mediatisierung: Fallstudien zum Wandel von Kommunikation* (Wiesbaden 2007); Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (Abingdon/New York 2013).

[28] Cf. Nick Couldry, 'Mediatization or Mediation? Alternative Understandings of the Emergent Space of Digital Storytelling', *New Media and Society* 10 (2008) 373-91; Sonia Livingstone, 'On the Mediation of Everything: ICA Presidential Adress 2008', *Journal of Communication* 59 (2009) 1-18. On the concept of media logic, see Knut Lundby, 'Media Logic: Looking for Social Interaction', in Idem (ed.), *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (New York 2009) 101-119.

[29] Cf. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, 'Introduction', in Eidem (eds.), *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington 2006) 1-25 at 7. Good case studies following this line of research are Charles Hirschkind's study of sermons in Egypt and the practice of listening to them on audiocassettes, and Bettina Gräf's study of the genre of fatwas, which are increasingly published online: Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York 2006); Bettina Gräf, *Medien-Fatwas von Yusuf al-Qaradawi und die Popularisierung des islamischen Rechtsverständniss* (Diss. University of Berlin 2008).

[30] Cf. Morten T. Højsgaard and Margit Warburg, 'Introduction', in Idem (eds.), *Religion and Cyberspace* (London 2005) 1-11 at 8-9; Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (New York 2006) 35-6.

[31] Cf. Van de Donk, 'Introduction', 5.

2.2 Collective actions and performances

2.2.1 Collective actions

Having introduced the concept of social movement and the significance of identity, culture, religion and media, we can proceed by discussing the role of actions in the construction of social movements.

Collective actions, understood as 'coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs', are considered as the basis for social movements.[32] Collective actions are typically performed by actors who lack regular access to institutions, and they usually take place outside the normal political channels. Often, the actions have a theatrical and symbolic character, since they are aimed at attracting mass media attention to bring a certain cause before the public. For shaping these actions, movements can select from a limited set of possible actions, a 'repertoire of contention', which is historically and culturally determined, but changes over time.[33] Current Western social movements, for instance, can select from possible actions such as demonstrations, marches, strikes, pamphleteering, petitioning and violence those that suit their purpose best. In the future some of these means might become outdated, while new ones may be developed. Along the same lines, we can say that suicide attacks have become part of the repertoire of contention of radical movements since the early 1980s, from which they were drawn by al-Qaeda in the course of the 1990s.

The concepts of collective action and repertoire of contention elucidate the significance of strategically chosen means of action for the construction of social movements. Even more interesting is the fact that some scholars have approached collective actions as performances, which facilitates the study of the actions' theatrical aspects and the relationship between the performers and the audience.[34]

2.2.2 Performances

For the purpose of this study, we can roughly distinguish two ways of approaching suicide attacks as performances.[35] In the first place, a performance can be considered

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[32] Sidney Tarrow (*Power in Movement*, 2-3), for instance, argues that social movements are often produced when social actors who lack regular access to institutions and pursue new goals that challenge others, start to concert their actions around common claims. For the definition of social movements, see Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, 6. See also Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 13-41.

[33] On repertoire of contention, see Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 31-47; McAdam, *Dynamics of Contention*, 137-41; Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge 2008) 31-6.

[34] Cf. Tilly, *Contentious Performances*. One of the experts in the field of performance studies, Jeffrey C. Alexander, has described the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath as a series of performances by Bin Laden and the Bush administration. However, he especially focuses on the media appearances of both actors instead of the violence itself and, moreover, he misinterprets al-Qaeda and its goals. Cf. Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'From the Depths of Despair: Performance, Counterperformance, and "September 11"', *Sociological Theory* 22 (2004) 88-105.

[35] For an overview of the field of performance studies, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (1977; New York 2003); Marvin Carlsen, *Performance: a Critical Introduction* (1996; rev. ed. London 2004); Jason L. Mast and Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Introduction', in Jeffrey C. Alexander,

an 'activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.'[36] Along these lines, the concept of performance can be used to study how actors attempt to make an impact on their audience or, as it is often stated, at creating 'fusion'. From this perspective, a performance can be conceived of as being carried out according to an (often unwritten) 'script'. This script is created from tools that are drawn from the cultural toolkit, such as culturally transmitted roles, values, beliefs and behaviours. These tools are selected and assembled over time, and together compose a script that provides guidelines for the performance, the *mise-en-scène*. Hence, performances such as plays, demonstrations or acts of violence are carried out in a (more or less) standardised fashion that has developed historically. Although each performance is based upon previous performances, the performances are also constantly adapted to their specific contexts.[37] In each performance, the actors improvise, innovate and recreate the script in their specific situation.[38] One of the reasons for this is that the actors aim at making an impact on their audience, and therefore always adapt their performances to the audience of that particular occasion.[39]

In the second place, rather than focusing on the performers' aim to make an impact on the audience, performances can also be studied by concentrating on the meanings of the performances for the actors involved. This approach finds its origins in Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach to social actions. In his famous essay on Balinese cockfights, Geertz describes a social practice in which, from a utilitarian point of view, the stakes are so high that it seems irrational for people to participate in them. However, as Geertz argued, attention must be drawn to the expressive, theatrical aspects and meanings of the practices, which he did by analysing the cockfights as a text: 'a story they tell themselves about themselves'.[40] By making comprehensible the structure of Balinese society and by incorporating central themes of Balinese life such as honour, prestige, status, humiliation, kinship and

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Bernhard Giesen and Jason L. Mast (eds.), *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge 2006) 1-28; Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: an Introduction* (2002; New York 2006).

[36] Ervin Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh 1956) 15.

[37] To provide an example: Shakespeare's (written) script of Hamlet is based upon certain culturally transmitted roles, values and beliefs about kingship, love, revenge, madness, suicide, etc. For present-day performers (and audiences), the meanings of these cultural tools will not be the same as for early seventeenth-century British. Moreover, present-day performances of Hamlet are not only based on Shakespeare's written script, but also on previous performances and current interpretations of the play, upon experiences of the producers, stage-managers and actors, etc. So we can state that present-day performers perform according to a changed (unwritten) script in comparison with Shakespeare's 'original' one. Hence, the meanings of the cultural tools, scripts and performances change over time and, moreover, vary each occasion. On Hamlet and its 'afterlife', see Robert S. Miola (ed.), *Hamlet: Text of the Play, the Actors' Gallery, Contexts, Criticism, Afterlife, Resources* (New York 2011).

[38] The idea that each performance 'cites' previous performances but in the meantime improvises is derived from semiotics. See, for example, Michael M. Bakhtin's emphasis on the 'citational quality' of language in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, transl. Vern W. McGee (Austin 1986).

[39] Cf. Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy', *Sociological Theory* 22 (2004) 527-73.

[40] Clifford Geertz, 'Deep Play. Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' (1972), in Idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York 1973) 412-53 at 448.

conflict, cockfights can be viewed as performances of life on the island itself, he argued.[41]

Although Geertz's drama analogy has been highly influential, it has also been criticised on some important points. Just as in the dramaturgical approach described above, more and more authors have emphasised the flexibility of the performances, the divergences from the scripts and the interactions between performers and audiences.[42] While Geertz had proposed to conceive culture as a text, the focus has increasingly shifted to its narration. Furthermore, the active role of the performances has become stressed more than before. Collective practices, such as cockfights, are not only passive reflections of the surrounding culture or stories people tell themselves about themselves, but they also actually change something. In other words, they have performative qualities as well.[43] Taking these criticisms into account, performances can be described as 'social processes by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation'.[44]

Both ways of looking at performances are useful for our purpose. On the one hand, jihadist suicide attacks can be considered as performances that are based on a script that had been developed in the early 1980s and was appropriated by jihadists in the course of the 1990s. By exploring the script and the tools on which it is based as well as the ways in which it was used and improvised upon, we are able to study the ways in which al-Qaeda has attempted to draw attention to its cause and make an impact on its audience. On the other hand, rather than viewing suicide attacks as attempts to influence the audience, we can also focus on the meanings of the violence for its participants. Along the lines of the cultural approach to violence as presented in chapter 1, performances can be approached as practices that tell a 'story' about their perpetrators; a story that not only provides insights into the social situation of the performers, but also brings it about.[45]

Yet performances mean different things to different observers. It is at this point that jihadist media use in general and al-Sahab's martyrdom videos in particular come into view, as it is here that jihadists participate in the negotiations about and

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[41] In *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton 1980), Geertz further developed the drama analogy: the ceremonies and rituals in the 'theatre state' of nineteenth-century Bali did not serve the power of the state, but the reverse was the case: theatre was an end in itself.

[42] An early but influential example is Albert Lord's analysis of performances of Bosnian poets who, Lord argues, performed the same story differently on every occasion. Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge 1960).

[43] The term 'performative utterances' was coined by the English philosopher John Austin, who analysed speech acts like 'I name this ship', which not so much describe a situation as bring it about. Austin's student John R. Searle further developed this theory by emphasising the performance aspect of all language use in their specific context. Cf. John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge 1969).

[44] Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics', 529.

[45] That the concept of performance can be fruitfully used to analyse the 'theatres of violence' that were brought about by people such as Mahmud Abouhalima, Shoko Asahara, Baruch Goldstein and Timothy McVeigh, has been convincingly argued in Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 123-8.

(re)constructions of these meanings. The concept of framing can be used to study this process.

2.3 Framing

The concept of framing has been developed mainly in the field of media studies in order to study how news media make sense of the events in our world and, thereby, produce meaning. In the last decades, it has been appropriated by social movement theorists to study how social movements try to attract, bind and mobilise their supporters by diagnosing the state of affairs, offering alternatives and suggesting ways to bring these alternatives about.

Frames, as understood by Erving Goffman, are 'schemata of interpretation that allow people to locate, perceive, identify and label events'.[46] They define the situation people are in and thereby enable them to make sense of (their experiences of) the events around them. Framing is crucial for social movements because, by defining and giving meaning to (events in) the world, they can create a sense of solidarity and a common purpose among its participants, and thus mobilise and sustain collective action.[47] To accomplish this end, social movements have three so-called 'core framing tasks': they should diagnose the situation, identify the problems and those who are to blame (diagnostic framing), suggest alternatives and strategies to achieve them (prognostic framing), and instigate the audience to take action (motivational framing).[48]

Yet framing is not as static as these core framing tasks suggest, since the different tasks always overlap, and frames are continuously modified. There usually exist several contesting frames of various movements besides each other, which challenge each other's diagnoses, solutions and strategies. Within framing contests like these, media are the central stage on which parties struggle for the dominance of their own frame. They are 'the arena in which symbolic contests are carried out among competing sponsors of meaning'.[49] Framing contests and counter frames by rivals are one of the reasons that frames are continuously adapted. Another reason is the reception of the frame by the audience or, in other words, the 'resonance' between the movement´s frames and the frames of the audience. Frame resonance depends on a number of factors, social movement theorists have learned. For instance, the articulators of the frames have to be considered authoritative and trustworthy by the audience, and the frames have to align with the audience´s

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[46] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (London 1974) 21.
[47] Social movement frames thus not only define the situation for the audience, but also aim at mobilising the movement´s participants, which is why they are labelled 'collective action frames': 'action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns.' Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000) 611-639 at 614. See also William A. Gamson, 'Constructing Social Protest', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds.), *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis 1995) 85-106 at 89.
[48] Cf. Benford, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements, 615-18.
[49] William A. Gamson et al., 'Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality', *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992) 373-393 at 385.

experiences, beliefs and values.[50] When these criteria are not met, the audience will not be convinced and the movement will adapt its frame. In such a situation, movements may clarify and invigorate their frames by selecting and emphasising specific ideas (i.e. 'frame amplification'), expand their frames by incorporating issues that are of secondary importance to the organisation but significant to connect with the audience (i.e. 'frame extension'), or connect their frames with formerly unrelated frames in order to appeal to a larger number of people (i.e. 'frame bridging'). In these ways, social movements can attempt to (re)connect their frames with the audience or, in other terms, achieve 'frame alignment', which is crucial in their attempt to attract, bind and mobilise support.[51]

The concept of framing thus complements our conceptual framework. By first exploring jihadism as a social movement that is in need of creating solidarity among its participants, and by subsequently studying the role of suicide attacks and martyrdom videos therein through the concepts of performance and framing, respectively, this study sheds new light on the central role of martyrdom and 'martyrdom operations' in jihadist discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

[50] Benford, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements, 619-22.

[51] David A. Snow et al., 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation', *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986) 464-481.

PART II: JIHADISM AND AL-QAEDA

3 Jihadism as social movement

The jihadist movement consists of men and women who identify with each other without having ever met, and who feel connected with battles in places where they have never been. Although they are from various regions in the world, have different socioeconomic, political and cultural backgrounds and are driven by divergent motivations, they feel connected and believe that they are waging the same battle. What does this say about the jihadist movement? Why is it attractive for young people from different regions in the world, and what is the role of religion in binding them?

This chapter provides a general introduction to jihadism and al-Qaeda along the lines of social movement theory. It starts with exploring the history (3.1) and the participants and organisational structure of the jihadist movement (3.2). After having argued that jihadism resembles new social movements in many respects, I proceed with addressing the issues of ideology and religion which, according to several social movement scholars, have become increasingly important as tools for constructing a movement's collective identity (3.3). Although jihadism will prove to be no exception in this case, the final sections argue that the roots of jihadism should not only be sought in age-old Islamic sources, but also in Muslim traditions that jihadists perceive as heretical (3.4), as well as in modern processes such as globalisation, deterritorialisation and individualisation, which have led to extensive reinterpretations of traditional views and practices (3.5). The chapter concludes that jihadism is a distinctly modern movement that anchors itself in perceived authentic Islamic traditions, and can therefore be attractive for people all over the world.

3.1 Jihadism: a history

3.1.1 From Jaji to Manhattan

The legendary battle of Jaji in April 1987 (see Ch. 1.1) would become the founding myth of al-Qaeda. The battle in which Bin Laden and a group of Arab fighters were able to hold off a Soviet attack on Bin Laden's compound Masada ('Lion's Den') for an entire week would come to symbolise the Afghan Arabs perceived defeat of the first superpower. Within two years after the battle, the Soviets would retreat from

Afghanistan and soon thereafter the Soviet Union collapsed. The remaining superpower would soon follow, they hoped.[1]

Despite the stories about legendary battles, heroic fights and miraculous events that emanated from Afghanistan, the numbers of Arabs that went there to defend the *dar al-islam* against the Soviet forces should not be overestimated.[2] In total, several thousands of Arabs travelled to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area to train at the camps that had been established there. Yet most of the mujahidun spent only a brief period in the region, often without having fired a single bullet on the battlefield. As Peter L. Bergen writes: 'In the grand scheme of things the Afghan Arabs were no more than extras in the Afghan holy war. It was the lessons they learned from the jihad, rather than their contribution to it, that proved significant.'[3]

The Afghan Arabs would nevertheless lay the basis for the jihadist movement. Their experience in the jihad and their status as Afghanistan veterans caused them to become the core of the jihadist movement in the 1990s. After the retreat of the Soviets from Afghanistan, many fighters returned to their home countries to join radical organisations there or to establish new ones, such as the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria and the Militant Islamic Group in Libya. Others went to different places to wage jihad and joined conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya, Dagestan, Kashmir, the Philippines, Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere, often becoming leading figures in the Arab groups participating in these conflicts.

The 'old guard' jihadists, as the Afghanistan veterans have been called, were mostly Saudis and Egyptians.[4] Yet their political and religious backgrounds and ideological views diverged significantly, as had already become manifest in the late 1980s. The prime propagandist of the Afghan jihad, 'Abdullah 'Azzam, preferred to focus on Afghanistan until an Islamic emirate was established here, which subsequently should have been used as a base to liberate other lands, foremost among them Palestine.[5] 'Azzam and his sympathisers were opposed by Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. Due to Bin Laden's financial resources and al-Zawahiri's network among Egyptian jihadists, they had become influential figures in the movement soon after travelling to Afghanistan. In line with al-Zawahiri's background as the emir of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, these men and their supporters argued that they should also target the alleged 'apostate' regimes in their home countries. After 'Azzam's

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[1] On the battle of Jaji and its consequences, see Bergen, *Holy War*, 56-7; Idem, *Bin Laden*, 48-58; Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York 2004) 162-3.

[2] Estimations about the numbers of Afghan Arabs vary from several thousand to about 20,000. On the phenomenon of the so-called 'Muslim foreign fighters', see Thomas Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad', *International Security* 35 (2010) 53-95.

[3] Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, 56.

[4] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 48-9. On the Saudi fighters, see Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 43-8.

[5] See, for example, 'Azzam's fatwa *Al-Difa' 'an 'Aradi al-Muslimin Ahamm Furud al-A'yan* ['Defense of the Muslim Lands: the First Obligation after Faith'], 1987, available at www.tawhed.ws (Arabic) and www.kalamullah.com; www.religioscope.com (English transl.), last accessed January 2014. See also Thomas Hegghammer, 'Introduction: Abdallah Azzam, the Imam of Jihad', in Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli (eds.), *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, transl. Pascale Ghazaleh (2005; Cambridge 2008) 81-101.

assassination in November 1989, the latter position gradually gained ground at the cost of the former. 'Azzam's more classical defensive jihad against foreign occupants of Muslim lands was increasingly abandoned for Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's stance, which aimed at combining this jihad with fighting Muslim regimes in the Muslim world.[6] Meanwhile, 'Azzam's organisation Maktab al-Khidmat ('the Services Bureau'), which had been established to facilitate the Arabs in Afghanistan, was gradually replaced by the network that had been established by Bin Laden and would eventually become known as al-Qaeda.[7]

Due to Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's extensive connections in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as with the Afghan Arabs, the men and their organisation occupied a prominent place in the emerging jihadist movement from its onset. This role would become even more pronounced after they shifted their main focus towards the so-called 'far enemy' – the United States and its allies – in the early 1990s. The jihad against the 'near enemy', the 'apostate' regimes in the Muslim world, had not delivered any significant successes, and the Soviet Union had disappeared from the world stage, leaving the United States as the sole world power. Moreover, the Gulf War (1990-1991) strengthened anti-American feelings among jihadists. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August, the Saudi King Fahd (1921-2005) asked the United States to protect the Kingdom against a possible invasion by troops of Saddam Hussein (1937-2006), while refusing the help of Osama bin Laden and his network. Fahd's request and the subsequent presence of 'infidel' troops on the Arabian Peninsula evoked furious reactions among Saudi opposition movements as well as transnational jihadists, and further fuelled the shift towards the 'far enemy'.[8]

As a result of his fierce criticisms of the House of Saud after the Gulf War, Bin Laden was forced to leave Saudi Arabia, to where he had returned after the war in Afghanistan. He went into exile in Sudan but, after his alleged involvement in the Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia in 1993 and the failed assassination attempt of the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (b. 1928) in Addis Ababa in 1995, the pressure on the Sudanese regime to expel Bin Laden increased, after which he decided to leave the country. In 1996, he and his entourage returned to Afghanistan, which, by then, had come under the control of the Taliban.[9] Here, Taliban leader Mullah 'Omar (b. c. 1959) gave Bin Laden the opportunity to further expand his network and train a new generation of jihadists. The 'war against the Americans occupying the Land of the

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[6] For al-Zawahiri's own account of his career and the development of the jihad, see Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Fursan tahta Rayat al-Nabi* ['Knights under the Banner of the Prophet'], n.d., available at www.tawhed.ws, last accessed January 2014. For a (not very reliable) English translation, see Laura Mansfield, *His Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri* (Old Tappan 2006) 17-225.

[7] Probably, the group was labelled as al-Qaeda only in the second half of the 1990s. Cf. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, 1-8; Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 29.

[8] Cf. Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad went Global* (Cambridge 2005) 143-50; Steven Brooke, 'The Near and Far Enemy Debate', in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (Abingdon/New York 2011) 47-68.

[9] On the Taliban, see Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan* (1998; London 2002); Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Game in Central Asia* (2000; New Haven 2010).

Two Holy Places' (i.e. Saudi Arabia) that Bin Laden declared in a fatwa in 1996 entered its 'golden age' (1996-2001).[10]

Due to strategic media use, which we will further explore in the next chapter, Bin Laden became the face of the global jihad during this period. His prominence resulted in increasing amounts of funding and the establishment of training camps near Jalalabad and Kandahar. These camps were visited by a mounting number of young men, not only from the Arab world, but also increasingly from non-Arab regions, including Europe. In addition, the growing international appeal of the movement and its shift towards the 'far enemy' manifested itself in attacks against Western targets. After the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, several high-profile attacks against international targets failed, such as the so-called Bojinka Plot of 1995 and the Millennial Plot of 2000. Yet other attacks against Western targets succeeded. In 1998, the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salam were destroyed by two simultaneous truck bomb explosions, which killed over 200 people. Two years later, a suicide attack was carried out against the Navy Destroyer USS Cole near the Yemeni port of Aden. About one year thereafter, nineteen young Arabs would definitively establish al-Qaeda's name by bringing the jihad to the enemy's soil itself, striking at its heart in New York and Washington.

3.1.2 From Manhattan to Abbottabad

For al-Qaeda, the attacks of 9/11 changed the situation dramatically. Within months, the jihadists lost their organisational infrastructure in Afghanistan. Many fighters retreated to the Pakistani border area, and others left the region entirely. The invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies definitely weakened al-Qaeda, and therefore the jihadist movement. In turn, however, the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan brought al-Qaeda and Mullah 'Omar's organisation closer together. Moreover, several Pakistani organisations radicalised after President Musharraf (b. 1943) increasingly lent his support to the America-led 'war on terror'. Formerly local organisations, such as Jaish-e Muhammad, joined the jihadist movement and shifted their focus to the global jihad. The lines between the various organisations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Central Asian republics became increasingly blurred, with groups making brief alliances and frequently changing their names. Local and transnational as well as tribal, ideological and strategic interests often blended, while the leaders' control over the organisations weakened considerably.[11]

The same trend was discernible in other regions in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In Iraq a similar pattern unfolded after the U.S.-led invasion of the country in 2003. In addition to Shia and secular-nationalist groups, several radical Sunni movements entered the scene. Some of them had a largely non-Iraqi character, such as the Jama'a al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad. In 2004, this group, led by the Jordanian Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006), adopted al-Qaeda's name by calling

[10] Cf. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 43-6.
[11] Cf. Abou Zahab, *Islamist Networks*.

itself 'al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers' (Iraq).[12] In Northern Africa and on the Arabian Peninsula too, organisations inspired by al-Qaeda adopted its name and started to present themselves as 'al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb' and 'al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula', respectively. Besides, various groups that had mainly identified with national or regional causes, such as the Southeast Asian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, shifted their attention to the global jihad. Although the al-Qaeda leadership had largely lost its ability to organise large-scale operations far away from its bases, it had become a source of inspiration to individuals, groups and organisations in other parts of the world.

Meanwhile, especially since the second half of the 2000s, the heterogeneity and decentralisation of the jihadist movement resulted in more and more public disagreements between prominent jihadists, as well as in an increasing criticism of al-Qaeda. One of the most prominent of these critics was Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (b. 1950), better known as 'Dr Fadl'. This Egyptian, a former associate of al-Zawahiri and the writer of what has been called 'al-Qaeda's Guide to Jihad', started to criticise al-Qaeda during his imprisonment in Egypt. He personally attacked Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri as religiously uninformed 'false prophets'. Moreover, in a book entitled *Rationalising Jihad*, Dr Fadl criticised al-Qaeda's strategy and ideology, condemning the 9/11 attacks and the killing of fellow Muslims.[13] Although al-Zawahiri tried to refute Dr Fadl's critique in several statements and in a book entitled *The Exoneration*, these and other disputes affected the credibility of al-Qaeda's message.[14] A Pew Research Center poll in Pakistan in the spring of 2009 indicated that only 9 per cent of the surveyed had a favourable view of 'al-Qaeda'; a dramatic decrease compared with the 25 per cent of the spring of 2008.[15]

In sum, the jihadist movement, which had its roots in the 1980s and, headed by al-Qaeda, developed into a flexible network in the 1990s, gradually became a loose collection of dispersed groups after 9/11. Al-Qaeda's leading role declined, especially in the second half of the 2000s. Moreover, it lost its icon with the killing of Bin Laden in Abbottabad in May 2011 and, although he was replaced by the equally

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[12] In 2013, the organisation's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (b. 1971), announced that al-Qaeda in Iraq had merged with the Syrian group Jabhat al-Nusra and would continue under the name of the 'Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham'. The merger, however, was immediately rejected by al-Nusra's leader as well as by al-Zawahiri, as became clear from a letter obtained by Al Jazeera. Al-Baghdadi, in turn, disregarded al-Zawahiri's appeal, and the same is true for many (non-Syrian) al-Nusra fighters, who left al-Nusra to join al-Baghdadi. These events clearly underline the point that the jihadist movement is diverse and decentralised. Cf. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, 'Syria's al-Nusra Front – Ruthless, Organised and Taking Control', *The Guardian*, 10 July 2013, at www.theguardian.com, last accessed January 2014.

[13] Dr Fadl's book *Tarshid al-'Aml al-Jihadi fi Misr wa-l-'Alim* (November 2007), which is usually translated as *Rationalising Jihad in Egypt and the World*, is available at www.e-prism.org (Arabic), last accessed August 2013.

[14] Al-Zawahiri's *Al-Tabri'a: Risala fi Tabri'a Ummat al-Qalam wa-l-Sayf min Manqasat Tuhmat al-Khawr wa-l-Du'f* (March 2008), which is translated as *The Exoneration: A Treatise Exonerating the Nation of the Pen and the Sword from the Denigrating Charge of Weakness and Fatigue*, is available at www.archive.org (Arabic) and www.fas.org (English transl.), last accessed August 2013). See also Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda*, 104-26; Nella Lahoud, 'Jihadi Recantations and their Significance: the Case of Dr Fadl', in Moghadam, *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, 138-57.

[15] The Pew Global Attitudes Project, 'Growing Concerns about Extremism, Continuing Discontent with U.S.', 13 August 2009, at www.pewglobal.org, last accessed May 2013.

experienced al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian has never been able to match the appeal of his Saudi predecessor. Yet the appeal of the jihadist movement in general has not declined in any significant manner. Its diffuse, decentralised and anti-hierarchic character proved valuable after the killing of Bin Laden and dozens of other high-ranked jihadists in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen in recent years. Moreover, rather than demonstrating the failure of the jihadist project, as has repeatedly been claimed, the uprisings in the Arab world since late 2010 have offered new opportunities for jihadist groups and organisations, as recent events throughout the Muslim world, and foremost among them in Syria, make painfully clear.

3.2 Jihadism: participants and organisational structure

The development of the jihadist movement displays many of the characteristics of new social movements as described in the previous chapter. A closer look at its participants and organisational structure underscores this view.

As might be clear from the above, the participants of the jihadist movement since the 1980s have been rather diverse. In general, three waves or generations of jihadists can be distinguished.[16] The first wave comprised those men who joined the jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s. This 'old guard' would form the leadership of jihadist groups and organisations in the next decades. The second wave consisted of those jihadists who joined the movement in the 1990s, some of whom fought in, among others, Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir, whereas others visited the training camps in Afghanistan after 1996. The third wave is made up of those jihadists who joined the movement after 9/11 and especially after the Iraq war of 2003, many of whom are self-trained.

The differences between the three waves are numerous. Whereas the old guard mainly consisted of highly educated members from the upper socioeconomic classes, the second and third generations of jihadists are mostly members of the middle and, to a lesser extent, lower classes.[17] In addition, their national and ethnic backgrounds vary widely. The first two waves mainly comprised Arabs from the Middle East, but the second wave already witnessed an increasing involvement of Muslims from outside the Arab world, especially from Southeast Asia and Europe. This trend would strongly continue after 9/11, when several Southeast Asian as well as Maghrebian groups joined the global jihad. Besides, more and more Afghans, Pakistanis and Central Asians linked themselves to the global struggle, and the same is true for jihadists from the West, most of them being second-generation Muslims, students from the Middle East and converts.[18] Finally, the religious backgrounds of jihadists are rather divergent. While the first wave of jihadists had generally been raised in religious families and had often received religious education, many of the second and third waves have grown up in secular environments and can be better characterised as 'born-again Muslims'.[19]

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[16] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 48-50.
[17] Sageman, *Terror Networks*, 73-7; Idem, *Leaderless Jihad*, 48-50.
[18] Abou Zahab, *Islamist Networks*; Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 301-3 and 315-9; Sageman, *Terror Networks*, 70-3.
[19] Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 308-9; Sageman, *Terror Networks*, 74-8; Idem, *Leaderless Jihad*, 51-2

The diversity of the participants of the jihadist movement thus resembles the composition of new transnational social movements as described above. This is also the case with the organisational structure of jihadism, which is better comparable to that of new social movements such as anti-globalism and environmentalism than to Islamist movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah.[20] According to social movement scholars, three different aspects of movement organisation can be distinguished: 1) formal organisation, referring to organisations within the broader movement; 2) the organisation of collective action, which may vary from temporary mobilisation to formal cells or branches; and 3) mobilising structures that link leaders with grassroots activists.[21] What we have noticed is that the organisation of jihadism has decreased on all levels, especially in the twenty-first century. Organisations such as al-Qaeda have become more diffuse and decentralised, collective action has been organised increasingly from below and jihadists have acted increasingly autonomous from the 'old guard' leadership or, as it has also been called, 'al-Qaeda hardcore'.[22] Just like other recent social movements, the post-9/11 jihadist movement is composed of loose relationships between networks and groups. Whereas most of the second generation jihadists could often be directly linked to Bin Laden and his companions, these links gradually disappeared. Many of the third generation are so-called home-grown jihadists who are autonomous and unknown to the old-guard leadership.[23] Especially since 9/11 and the loss of the organisational structures in Afghanistan, the movement has been characterised by bottom-up activities, and its structure has become increasingly fluid and fragmented.

The composition and organisational structure of the jihadist movement, particularly in the twenty-first century, thus closely resemble the composition and structure of new social movements. Just as other transnational social movements, jihadism assembles people with diverse backgrounds in a flexible movement that constantly develops, adapting itself to its rapidly changing environment. Since the 1980s, jihadism has transformed from a relatively centralised and well-structured, predominantly higher class Arab movement into a dynamic, decentralised and globally-oriented one with participants who are rather diverse regarding their socioeconomic, political, national, ethnic and religious backgrounds. This transformation can be partly ascribed to external factors, such as the political opportunities and constraints. The claim that social movements emerge when political opportunities broaden, appears to be true also for jihadism.[24] The opportunities provided by the Afghan war in the 1980s, the Taliban regime in the late 1990s and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 and 2003, respectively, have facilitated the emergence of three generations of jihadists. Meanwhile, the restraints upon the movement, especially after 9/11, have forced jihadists to operate more clandestinely and therefore to rely on even more informal networks. Central control diminished and participation increasingly became a bottom-up process, causing further diversification of the movement.

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[20] Cf. Sutton, 'Islamic "New Social Movements"?', 106-8.
[21] Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 135-6.
[22] Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, 8.
[23] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 133-43.
[24] Cf. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 17-18 and 23.

Similar to other social movements, the development of jihadism cannot be ascribed to external factors only. Jihadists have also played an active role by making deliberate choices in their specific circumstances and by employing initiatives on their own, for instance by developing a sophisticated repertoire of public symbolic action. Before exploring these actions in the next chapters, however, we will first turn to jihadist thought. As outlined above, new social movements focus on so-called post-material issues, prominent among which are cultural, ideological and religious ones. In this case too, jihadism is no exception.

3.3 Jihadist ideology

3.3.1 Ibn Taymiyya

As has become clear from our overview of the development of jihadism, an important way in which jihadists have distinguished themselves from others is by the definition of their enemies. These comprise both the perceived infidel invaders of the Muslim lands (the 'far enemy'), as well as the alleged apostate regimes in the Muslim world (the 'near enemy'). Jihadists' view on this point has been strongly influenced by the Hanbali[25] scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), who was one of the leading theologians in the Mamluk Empire during its wars against the Mongols. Ibn Taymiyya advocated an uncompromising doctrine of *tawhid*, the oneness and unity of God, meaning that he fiercely opposed devotion to beings other than God. According to Ibn Taymiyya, adherence to *tawhid* implies that rulers should implement and uphold God's law (sharia) and that those who introduce or maintain man-made laws should be regarded as unbelievers (*kuffar*, sg. *kafir*) or polytheists (*mushrikun*, sg. *mushrik*), and thus be subject of excommunication (*takfir*). Even those leaders calling themselves Muslims can be declared infidels on the basis of their actions, Ibn Taymiyya stated, which he himself brought into practice against the Mongol rulers who had converted to Islam. Since they should be regarded as unbelievers who had invaded the *dar al-Islam*, Ibn Taymiyya subsequently argued, each individual Muslim had the duty to fight them.

This reasoning would become very influential in modern times, as Ibn Taymiyya's justification to fight leaders who present themselves as Muslims could be easily applied to the regimes in the modern Muslim world. Jihadists too, would embrace this line of thinking. However, they would do so mainly through the ideas of two ideological streams that would further develop Ibn Taymiyya's ideas: a Saudi and an Egyptian one. These two streams are often seen as the ideological basis of jihadism.[26]

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[25] The Hanbali school is one of the four mainstream schools of Sunni jurisprudence (next to the Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi'i) and is named after Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855). Currently, it is followed predominantly in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

[26] Cf. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 7-24; Wiktorowicz, 'Genealogy', 77-88; Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 22-41; Turner, 'From Cottage Industry'.

3.3.2 Wahhabism and Salafism

The Saudi intellectual current originated in the eighteenth century through the work of the influential scholar Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). Like Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab preached a rigorous monotheism and a return to the Quran and the *Sunna* (the exemplary way of life of the prophet Muhammad). He argued that Muslims had deviated from the right path by introducing all kinds of unacceptable innovations (*bid'a*), which should therefore be strongly condemned. In doing so, he further developed the concept of *takfir* by formulating 'the ten nullifiers of Islam' (*nawaqid al-islam*): ten beliefs or practices that make someone an 'apostate' (*murtadd*).[27] Accordingly, *takfir* should not only be applied to leaders who, in his view, disobeyed God's command to 'enjoin good and forbid evil' (*al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, e.g. Q 3:110 and 104, 7:157, 9:71), but also to Muslims venerating saints' tombs and relics and, by doing so, placed intermediaries between God and men. He therefore strongly opposed adherents of Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, as well as Shia Muslims, who, according to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, venerate their imams. He and his followers claimed that these alleged unbelievers should be disavowed, as Muslims should be loyal to God, Islam and Muslims only (*al-wala wa-l-bara*, loyalty and disavowal).[28]

Through its alliance with the Saudi state, the Wahhabi movement has become extremely influential, not only in Saudi Arabia, but via state sponsored missions, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, in the rest of the Muslim world as well.[29] It would also profoundly influence Salafism. This movement has its roots in the nineteenth century, when reformers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935) sought to revive Islam in response to the increasing Western dominance in the Middle-East and South Asia. Although these 'enlightened Salafis', as they have been called, were not so rigorous in their interpretation of *tawhid* as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab had been, they too, argued that Muslims had deviated from the pure Islam of the first generations and should return to this golden age to restore the glory of the past. On the way in which this restoration should be accomplished and what the role of modern ideas, sciences and technologies therein should be these reformers disagreed, however.

Along the lines of these late nineteenth-century reformers, the term Salafism, which is derived from *al-salaf al-salih* ('the pious ancestors', usually understood as the first three generations of Muslims), nowadays refers to those Muslims who attempt to follow the prophet Muhammad and his companions (*al-sahaba*) as closely as possible in all spheres of life.[30] Salafis thus agree with Wahhabis that Muslims

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[27] Cf. Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Nawaqid al-Islam* [The Nullifiers of Islam], n.d., available at www.tawhed.ws (Arabic) and www.islambasics.com (English transl.), last accessed June 2013.

[28] For a genealogy of the concept of 'loyalty and disavowal', see Joas Wagemakers, 'The Transformation of a Concept: *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* in the Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 81-106.

[29] For a thorough introduction to Wahhabism, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York 2006).

[30] Like 'jihadism', 'Salafism' has become a mainstream term in popular and scholarly discourse after 9/11. For a helpful discussion of the term, see Hegghammer, 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries?', 244-66.

should go back to the earliest sources to restore the Islam of the first generations. Unlike Wahhabis, however, Salafis argue that the four recognised schools (*madhahib*, sg. *madhhab*) of legal jurisprudence (*fiqh*) within Sunni Islam should be rejected. Whereas Wahhabis in practice follow the Hanbali school of law, Salafis only acknowledge the Quran and the (authentic) *hadiths* (narrations about the Prophet and his companions) as sources for their practices and beliefs. These sources can be interpreted independently (*ijtihad*), they contend, instead of following one of the four schools of law (*taqlid*).[31]

Despite these doctrinal characteristics, Salafism is a rather diverse movement, as can be seen in its attitude towards non-Salafis and, related to that, towards the practices of *takfir* and jihad. Whereas some Salafis assert that unbelievers should be convinced by means of words (*da'wa*), others attempt to change society through politics. A third group, finally, is convinced that jihad is a legitimate means to propagate their cause.[32] This group, which is often called 'Jihadi-Salafis', forms an important, if not the most important, constituent of the jihadist movement.

3.3.3 The Muslim Brotherhood and Qutbism

The Egyptian current finds its origins in British-controlled India, and especially in the Indo-Pakistani intellectual Abu al-A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979). Mawdudi, who aimed to appropriate those aspects of modernity he deemed useful, drew heavily on Ibn Taymiyya to distinguish 'true Muslims' from those who did not stick to a strict interpretation of *tawhid*. According to Mawdudi, the maintenance of man-made laws by both imperialist powers and so-called Muslim leaders had led to a situation that was comparable to the 'period of ignorance' of pre-Islamic times (*jahiliyya*). Just as the Prophet had battled this situation in the seventh century, he stated, Muslims should fight the 'modern *jahiliyya*'.

Mawdudi's analysis would make a strong impact on the most prominent intellectual of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) as a grassroots movement aimed at mass mobilisation to establish an Islamic state, which it initially mainly tried to achieve through religious education of the youth. Yet, in the following decades, the movement politicised and became a fierce opponent of the Egyptian regime, especially since the Free Officers coup in 1952 and the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970). It was foremost Qutb who underpinned this opposition. Qutb appropriated Ibn Taymiyya's rigorous interpretation of *tawhid* as well as Mawdudi's notion of the 'modern *jahiliyya*' in order to legitimise the movement's resistance. In contrast to Mawdudi, however, Qutb argued that the solution should be found in jihad. This jihad should be led by an Islamic vanguard

[31] On the difference between Wahhabism and Salafism in this respect, see Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 33-57 at 42-5.

[32] For the distinction between so-called 'Quietists', 'Politicos' and 'Jihadi-Salafis', see Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'. This anatomy should not be taken too strictly, though, as is convincingly argued in Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi*.

(*tali'a*), which has the task to restore the sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) of God over the rule of men.[33]

The influence of Qutb's views can hardly be overestimated. One of the men influenced by Qutb was an ideological leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj (1954-1982). In his pamphlet *The Neglected Duty*, which drew heavily on both Ibn Taymiyya and Qutb, Faraj called upon his supporters to return to jihad – the 'neglected duty' – in order to overthrow the Egyptian government.[34] This pamphlet strongly inspired the assassinators of Anwar al-Sadat (1918-1981), for which Faraj was executed. In addition to the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which eventually joined the global jihad under the leadership of its emir al-Zawahiri, other organisations such as Takfir wa-l-Hijra and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya were also strongly influenced by Qutb's reasoning. More importantly, Qutb's ideas had a strong impact on global jihadism.

3.3.4 The global jihad

Both the transnational and mainly apolitical Saudi current as well as the more nationally oriented and politicised Egyptian current have profoundly influenced jihadism. Although 'jihadist ideology' is not as clear-cut and coherent as the heading of this section might suggest, all jihadist ideologues have borrowed extensively from the above-mentioned thinkers' views on, among others, *tawhid*, *takfir*, *al-salaf al-salih* and *al-wala wa-l-bara*. Since we will extensively deal with jihadist – and, particularly, al-Qaeda's – reasoning throughout the course of this book, I will now only illustrate jihadist appropriation of the views described above by means of Bin Laden's 1996 Declaration of War.[35]

In this document, the al-Qaeda leader provides a general argumentation for the 'war against the Americans occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places', as the title of the Declaration sounds. In order to underpin his legitimisation of a defensive jihad, Bin Laden borrows extensively from Ibn Taymiyya, whom he quotes at length

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[33] Qutb's ideas found their main expression in his *Ma'alim fi l-tariq* ['Milestones along the Road'], which was first published in 1964 (available at www.tawhed.ws, last accessed February 2013). See also Sayed Khatab, '*Hakimiyyah* and *Jahiliyyah* in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb', *Middle Eastern Studies* 38 (2002) 145-170; William E. Shepard, 'Sayyid Qutb's Doctrine of *Jāhiliyya*', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003) 521-45. For thorough works on Qutb's ideas, see Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (Beirut 1992); Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism. A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton 1999);

[34] Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, *Al-Farida al-Gha'iba* [The Neglected Duty], n.d., available at www.tawhed.ws, last accessed April 2014. An English translation is available in Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York 1986). See also Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, transl. Jon Rothschild (1984; London 1985); Johannes J.G. Jansen, 'The Creed of Sadat's Assassins: The Context of "The Forgotten Duty" Analysed', *Die Welt des Islams* 25 (1985) 1-30.

[35] Cf. Bin Laden, *I'lan al-Jihad 'ala al-Amrikiyyin al-Muhtalin li-Bilad al-Haramayn* ['Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places'], *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 23 August 1996, available at www.tawhed.ws (Arabic) and www.pbs.org (English transl.), last accessed December 2013.

several times. The 'Zionist-crusader alliance', Bin Laden claims, has occupied the 'land around the Furthest Mosque' (Palestine) as well as 'the Land of the Two Holy Places' (Saudi Arabia), the latter of which he justifies by pointing at the presence of American troops in the Kingdom since the Gulf War. Hence, his argument runs, because parts of the *dar al-islam* are occupied, a defensive jihad must be waged, and therefore each Muslim individually has the duty to join the battle in order to liberate these lands and re-establish the greatness of the *umma*. In the meantime, however, the Saudi regime also lost its legitimacy. It has not adhered to the strict interpretation of *tawhid* which Bin Laden upholds in the footsteps of Ibn Taymiyya, 'Abd al-Wahhab and Qutb. Referring to 'Abd al-Wahhab's 'nullifiers of Islam', the declaration states that 'to use man-made law instead of the sharia and to support infidels against the Muslims is one of the ten "nullifiers" that would strip a person from his Islamic status.' Thus, Bin Laden concludes, the Saudi regime too, should be fought, although the primary enemy remains 'the occupying American enemy', because the U.S. is the main cause of the current situation of the *umma*.

In waging their battle, the text indicates, jihadists should follow the example of the *salaf*. Bin Laden extensively quotes from the Quran and Hadith to make his argument, and he often directly translates the situation of the seventh century one-to-one to the current context. For example, he compares the Quraysh that opposed Muhammad and his companions with the Americans on the Arabian Peninsula, and presents the young men who killed Abu Jahl, one of the leaders of the Meccan Quraysh, as an example for the jihadist youths. Moreover, these youths should not stop fighting, Bin Laden indicates, because when the Prophet once intended to put his sword aside after a battle, the angel Jibril (Gabriel) withheld him from doing so, after which Muhammad and his followers marched on, accompanied by angels. By going directly back to the sources, interpreting them independently, taking the predecessors as an example, advocating a defensive jihad, following a rigid interpretation of *tawhid* and practising *takfir* against the Saudi regime, the Declaration of War clearly illustrates the impact of the above-mentioned views on jihadist thinking.[36]

Meanwhile, we should emphasise that whereas the Declaration of War consists of a general line of reasoning that was subscribed to by many jihadists, jihadist ideology was actually much more diverse. As the Declaration illustrates, Bin Laden was particularly influenced by the Saudi roots of jihadist thinking, whereas Egyptian jihadists such as al-Zawahiri usually pay more attention to the above-mentioned Egyptian ideologues.[37] Besides, as we will also see later, jihadist views increasingly started to diverge on some issues in the course of the twenty-first century, and especially on the means that should be used to wage jihad. More than its ideological predecessors, jihadists have emphasised the importance of martyrdom

[36] The fatwa Bin Laden issued in 1998 together with some fellow jihadists, among whom al-Zawahiri, on behalf of the so-called World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders shows a comparable pattern, but, because of its shorter length, its argumentation is less extensive. See World Islamic Front, *Biyan al-Jabha al-Islamyya al-'Alamiyya li-Jihad al-Yuhud wa-l-Salibiyyin* ['Statement of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders'], *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 23 February 2008, available at http://www.library.cornell.edu (Arabic and Egnlish transl.), last accessed January 2014.

[37] See, for example, al-Zawahiri, *Fursan tahta Rayat al-Nabi*, 10-1.

and self-sacrifice in this respect, in particular after they had embraced suicide attacks as a means to combat their enemies. Yet, whereas al-Qaeda's leaders strongly advocated the use of 'martyrdom operations', important jihadist thinkers such as the Palestinian-Jordanian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (b. 1959), the Syrian Abu Mus'ab al-Suri (b. 1958) and the Palestinian-Jordanian Abu Qatada al-Filistini (b. 1959/60), disagreed with al-Qaeda's leaders about the tactics and means to be employed in the jihad in the twenty-first century (see Ch. 6.2.1). So whereas the above-mentioned 'roots' provide some common basis for jihadist thinking, the uniformity of its ideology should not be overestimated. The next section will further elaborate this point.

3.4 Heterodox traditions

Most scholars have focused on the above-mentioned aspects of jihadist thinking. Ibn Taymiyya and the Saudi and Egyptian streams are widely accepted as the intellectual predecessors of jihadism, also by jihadists themselves. Al-Suri, for example, indicates that he sees Ibn Taymiyya, Wahhabism, Salafism, Qutb and 'some basic elements' from the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology as the main sources of jihadism.[38] However, the Middle Eastern, Arab and Sunni-centred genealogy of jihadist ideology as presented above is insufficient to fully understand jihadist thought: an aspect which is largely neglected in scholarly literature.[39] Jihadism has not been limited to the Arab Middle East, and Sunni thinkers have not been the only ones affecting jihadism. On the contrary, at least until the 2003 Iraq war, jihadism has mainly manifested itself outside the Middle East and the Arab world, in places such as Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir and Somalia. The groups from these regions that have joined the movement, each with its own background and rooted in its specific local contexts, have also had a profound impact on jihadist thought.

To take the example of South Asia, which has played such an important part in the development of the jihadist movement and particularly al-Qaeda, the jihadist groups and organisations that originated there have been deeply affected by local circumstances. The ideology of the Pakistani Lashkar-e Taiba ('The Army of the Pure'), for instance, on the one hand shows many parallels with jihadist thinking as outlined above, such as its strict interpretation of *tawhid* and strong condemnation of *bid'a*, its emphasis on *ijtihad* and rejection of *taqlid*, and its plea for a global jihad as an individual duty for each Muslim. On the other hand, a large majority of the organisation's members are Pakistani and, as a result, it has been strongly coloured by its local context. The organisation's main focus has always been the Pakistani-Indian conflict, in particular the disputed Kashmir province, and its main targets in both words and deeds have remained the Hindu 'polytheists'. Moreover, its discourse is full of local notions, such as the concept of *'izzat* (honour, which is semantically related to the Arabic *'izza*), which is employed to legitimise revenge against the

[38] Brynjar Lia, '"Destructive Doctrinarians": Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of the Salafis in the Jihadi Current', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 281-300 at 286.
[39] For a noteworthy exception, see Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, esp. 20-6.

Hindus. Despite all this, Lashkar-e Taiba has increasingly linked with Arab jihadists in the region.[40]

Even more remarkable than the case of Lashkar-e Taiba, are the Afghan and Pakistani jihadist groups that have been influenced by Deobandism, a Sunni revivalist movement which emerged in British-controlled India and has thereafter spread throughout South Asia. Its current influence manifests itself for instance in the Taliban, as most of the latter's leaders have been educated in Deobandi madrassas. Moreover, some jihadist organisations have a profound Deobandi character, a prominent example of which is Jaish-e Muhammad ('Muhammad's Army'). This organisation, which was originally established as a counterweight to Lashkar-e Taiba, has increasingly shifted its aims from Kashmir to the global jihad in the period after 9/11, meanwhile strengthening its links with al-Qaeda and its jihadist counterparts. The striking fact in this case is that Deobandism is usually strongly condemned by Wahhabis and Salafis, mainly because it is associated with Sufism. Nevertheless, Jaish-e Muhammad has become part of the jihadist movement and, just as in the case of, Lashkar-e Taiba, its ties with the Wahhabi, Salafi and Qutbi-inspired Arab jihadists have strengthened during the last decade. The 'Pakistanisation of al-Qaeda' after 9/11 thus clearly illustrates that jihadism's ideological genealogy is not as straightforward as it is often presented.[41]

Yet the situation is even more complex. It was not only due to (predominantly) non-Arab and non-Middle Eastern movements that 'heterodox' elements have been incorporated in jihadist thinking. Since the very emergence of jihadism in the 1980s, Arab jihadists have merged the Saudi and Egyptian currents with elements from other Muslim denominations. The most remarkable of these elements are probably those which have been derived from Shiism and Sufism.[42] Although the perceived heretical Shia and Sufi Muslims are among their greatest adversaries, jihadists have appropriated more than a few of their beliefs and practices, especially those related to the theme of martyrdom.[43] Although we will encounter several examples of such borrowing throughout this book, I will now provide one brief example. In section 1.1 we have already noticed that martyrs were frequently associated with all kinds of miracles (*karamat*), both during their last period on earth and after their death. The prime reporter of miracle stories in Afghanistan in the 1980s, 'Azzam, openly relied on Sufi thinkers in his explanations for these miracles, despite his strong criticisms of the mystical Muslim current in other instances.[44] This paradox can be understood when realising that miracle stories like these were, and still are, rather common among the Afghans living in the Afghan-Pakistani border area, as is illustrated by the account of a local leader about two killed al-Qaeda fighters from briefly after 9/11:

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[40] Cf. Abou Zahab, *Islamist Networks*, 34-44; Idem, 'Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 126-42; Thomas K. Gugler, 'From Kalashnikov to Keyboard: Pakistan's Jihadiscape and the Transformation of Lashkar-e Tayba', in Rüdiger Lohlker (ed.), *New Approaches to Jihadism: Online and Offline* (Vienna 2012) 37-62.

[41] Abou Zahab, *Islamist Networks*, 62-71.

[42] For Sufism, see Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 41-53.

[43] About jihadism's anti-Shiism, see Guido Steinberg, 'Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of anti-Shi'ism', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 107-25.

[44] Darryl Li, 'Taking the Place of Martyrs: Afghans and Arabs under the Banner of Islam', *Arab Studies Journal* 20 (2012) 12-39 at 20-6.

> Local people soon began to see the two martyrs in their dreams. Now we believe that they are saints. Already many cures and miracles have been reported. If any of our women want to ask anything special from God, they first come here. […] They say that each *shahid* [martyr] emitted a perfume like that of roses. For many days a beautiful scent was coming from the place of their martyrdom.[45]

This account from the tribal belt between Afghanistan and Pakistan is strongly reminiscent of people visiting the graves of Sufi saints, who, in several regions in the Muslim world, are also associated with themes such as miracles, dreams and intercession.[46] Nevertheless, these themes have become firmly established in jihadist thought and practice since the 1980s. Beliefs and practices like these provided the Arabs and Afghans with a common vocabulary, thus enabling local people to identify with the global jihad, as the above example about the men being regarded as 'martyrs' illustrates.

Just as in the cases of Lashkar-e Taiba and Jaish-e Muhammad, the miracle stories from Afghanistan indicate that the ideology of jihadism is not as clear-cut as it is often presented by both jihadists and scholars. Instead, it is highly dynamic and easily combines Sunni ideologues such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Rida and Qutb with heterodox elements, while at the same time being strongly embedded in local contexts.[47] On the one hand, this might suggest that jihadist thought is too blurred to provide a common framework for the diverse participants of the movement. The conclusion imposes itself that, as the historian Faisal Devji writes, the extraordinary diverse membership of the jihadist movement 'is not united by way of any cultic or ideological commonality, to say nothing about that of class, ethnicity or personal background.'[48] On the other hand, exactly because of its hybridity and flexibility, jihadist ideology can be attractive for people with rather different backgrounds. Just as other social movements such as anti-globalism and environmentalism, its diffuse character and its fusion with local causes and concerns enables jihadism to expand beyond a specific region, class, ethnicity or religious current.

There is even more to say on this matter. Jihadist ideology is not the product of certain age-old Muslim traditions that have become blended with local practices and beliefs, as the above overview might suggest. Rather, it is deeply rooted in modernity.[49]

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[45] Quoted in William Dalrymple, 'Inside Islam's "Terror Schools"', *New Statesman*, 28 March 2005, available at http://www.newstatesman.com, last accessed June 2013.

[46] For some examples, see Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach* (1981; Upper Saddle River 2002) 272-7.

[47] That this is also the case in other regions is argued in Leheny, 'Terrorism', 100-8; Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'The Local and the Global in Saudi Salafi-Jihadi Discourse', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 301-20.

[48] Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 25.

[49] As Madawi Al-Rasheed ('The Local and the Global', 305) writes about jihadist discourse: '[I]t must be seen as a hybrid construction deeply rooted in the last three decades of the twentieth century that is desperate to anchor itself in authentic Islamic tradition, yet reflecting serious borrowing from the discourse of Western modernity. The outcome is a cross-fertilisation of sources that is both transnational and local. Today the ideology of Jihadis is a postmodern hybridity, whose sources, if ever we can accurately identify them, are found in the past and present, and in both Muslim and Western worlds.'

3.5 Jihadism as a globalised social movement

Jihadism is a modern movement in many ways, not in the least because of its use of modern technologies as we will see throughout the course of this book. In this section though, we will focus on two interrelated processes that have shaped both jihadist thought and practice: deterritorialisation and individualisation.

Firstly, jihadism is thoroughly deterritorialised.[50] Although it is embedded in local contexts, it is evident that the movement operates translocally and emphasises a global message. Moreover, jihadists typically give no importance to the concrete territories they are dwelling in, as their individual biographies demonstrate. Rather than waging jihad in their home countries, most jihadists left their birthplaces, cut the ties with their families and travelled to other places to join the jihad – often becoming so-called 'nomadic jihadists' who travelled from one place to another.[51] Moreover, they usually did not have a special relationship with the places they went to, but these were interchangeable as sites where the jihad could be practised. 'One week, the members were intent on fighting in Kosovo, the next in Chechnya or Afghanistan or Bosnia', someone wrote about the so-called Hamburg cell, which included three of the pilots of the 9/11 attacks.[52] The same could have been written about jihadists in general, who ignore geographical boundaries and are not so much interested in the concrete territories they fight in.

This striking fact from the life stories of jihadists corresponds well with jihadism's global message. Unlike Islamists, jihadists proclaim a global jihad that is not so much aimed at specific territories, nor restricted to certain national, ethnic or religious communities. Instead, jihadism is *umma*-oriented and claims to defend the worldwide community of Muslims. Yet this *umma* is not a strictly confined community that is limited by geographical boundaries. Rather, as Olivier Roy writes, it is an imaginary community 'beyond ethnicity, race, language and culture, one that is no longer embedded in a specific territory.'[53] Along the same lines, the ultimate goal of jihadists, the reestablishment of the caliphate, is not connected to any concrete territory. Despite its frequent recurrence in jihadist discourse, there have not appeared any concrete descriptions or plans for its establishment and organisation. Rather than conceiving it as a concrete political vision, it can therefore be better described as an ambiguous ideal, or even a metaphysical category that transcends geographical space.[54] Thus, although local concerns and objectives may have guided specific jihadist groups, jihadism's general orientation is disconnected from concrete territories and goals.

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[50] Cf. Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 302-7.

[51] According to Sageman's database of jihadists, 70 per cent of the jihadists joined the jihad in a country where they had not grown up, while another 8 per cent were second-generation emigrants in Europe and the U.S. Sageman, *Terror Networks*, 92.

[52] McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers*, 65. About their change of plans, see *9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York 2004) 165-6.

[53] Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 272. For the political dimension of this globalised conception of the *umma*, see Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London 2001).

[54] Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 84-6.

These deterritorialised, ambiguous objectives fit well with jihadists' emphasis on the return to the pure and ahistorical Islam of the Prophet and his companions. In the footsteps of Wahhabis and Salafis, jihadists insist on detaching Islam from more recent interpretations by, for instance, the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, but also from unlawful innovations and all kinds of 'cultural Islam'. In other words, they attempt to disconnect religion from its social and cultural contexts in order to return to the 'authentic' and 'pure' religion of the first Muslims.[55] This perceived 'deculturation', as Roy calls it, makes the jihadist message applicable in every situation. Jihadism is defined beyond cultures and local contexts, and can therefore fit with every culture and context. Hence, the jihadist message is a distinct product of processes such as globalisation, deterritorialisation and deculturation.

In addition, jihadism is also strongly individualised.[56] Its message is aimed at individuals rather than a certain community. Moreover, by considering jihad an individual duty that is incumbent upon every Muslim, jihadism appeals to each Muslim to join the jihad, thus making it a personal, voluntary decision. Again, this fits well within contemporary religiosity in general and Islam in particular. Traditional authorities such as the family, religious scholarship and teaching institutions have fragmented, and therefore religion has increasingly become a matter of personal choice.[57] Rather than taking the traditions of their families and local contexts for granted, Muslims are shaping their own beliefs and practices more than before. In doing so, they directly borrow from Islamic sources, which are becoming widely available. Meanwhile, they embrace new authorities, who are judged on their charisma and 'authenticity' instead of their religious knowledge. From the 'democratised' religious market, believers select those ideas and practices that fit their own experiences and feelings of authenticity, and are perceived as facilitating their personal spiritual development and self-realisation. So, rather than being inherited and self-evident, religion is increasingly becoming a matter of conscious deliberation and personal choice by individual believers.[58]

These developments, too, have profoundly influenced jihadism. Most jihadists have made an individual choice to join the jihad and can be characterised as 'born-again' believers. As noted above, most of them left their home countries and cut the ties with their families and religious and cultural traditions. The 'pure Islam' of jihadists offered them an attractive alternative to the 'cultural Islam' of their parents, and stimulated them to go back directly to the sources to discover 'what Islam really says.'[59] At the same time, it provided them with alternative authorities, many of whom were not religiously educated in a traditional manner, but were regarded as authentic and trustworthy because of their appearance. Together, these sources and authorities offered these Muslims clear guidelines in terms of laws and rituals, which supported them in their search for the right rules of conduct and, by presenting clear

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[55] Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 21-6 and 258-65.
[56] Cf. Ibidem, 148-200.
[57] On the fragmentation of traditional authorities, see Eickelman, *Muslim Politics*, 131-5.
[58] On this process of 'objectification' of religion, see ibidem, 37-45.
[59] Cf. Sadek Hamid, 'The Attraction of "Authentic" Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 384-403. About the search for a 'pure Islam' by young Muslims in the Netherlands, see Martijn de Koning, *Zoeken naar een 'Zuivere' Islam: Geloofsbeleving en Identiteitsvorming van Jonge Marokkaans-Nederlandse Moslims* (Amsterdam 2008).

boundaries between right and wrong, countered the insecurity that might accompany this quest.[60] Jihadism has given them the opportunity to develop themselves spiritually by emphasising individual worship, personal faith and self-realisation, for example by means of the internal, spiritual jihad. Finally, it has provided these men, who left their traditional communities, with an alternative, superior community that is based on the alleged timeless Islam of the Prophet and can therefore be followed everywhere.[61]

In short, jihadism is not the product of ancient Islamic traditions and local contexts. Instead, jihadists have drawn from their cultural and religious repertoire in a context that is distinctly modern. They have appropriated traditional beliefs and practices and applied them in a context that is characterised by processes such as globalisation, deterritorialisation, individualisation and the decline of traditional authorities. By employing classical notions such as *umma*, the caliphate and jihad in a new context, they provided them with new meanings that fit the contemporary world well. Yet we should realise that jihadism is not only a product, but also an agent of processes such as deterritorialisation and individualisation. In a time when religion has become less and less self-evident, jihadism gives guidance to young Muslims searching for new ways to give meaning to their lives. It provides them with a powerful model of identification that is detached from specific states and territories, and empowers them by offering them a leading role within the imagined community of the faithful.

3.6 Conclusion

Jihadism is, in several respects, better comparable to new social movements such as anti-globalism and environmentalism than to Islamist movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Its participants are diverse regarding their socioeconomic, national, political, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and its organisational structure is dynamic and increasingly fragmented, existing of loose links between a plethora of organisations, groups and individuals. And whereas al-Qaeda has played a leading role within the movement, particularly during the late 1990s and early 2000s, jihadism has always remained a hybrid collective.

Just as for other social movements, fostering a sense of solidarity has therefore become a prime concern for jihadists. Moreover, just as in other cases, religion has provided a fruitful resource in this respect. As we have seen, jihadists have extensively borrowed from the Muslim tradition. They have presented themselves as the successors of the *salaf*, proclaimed a return to the Quran and Hadith, traced their genealogy back to thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and Qutb and appropriated established Islamic concepts such as *jahiliyya*, jihad, *takfir* and *tawhid*. We have also noticed that jihadist thought is not as straightforward as it is often presented. It is strongly embedded in local contexts and incorporates several elements from non-Sunni currents, some of which are even deemed heretical by

[60] Cf. Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 265-9.

[61] Cf. Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, ‘Salafism in France: Ideology, Practices and Contradictions’, in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 364-83 at 366.

jihadists themselves. Moreover, the narratives, symbols, values, beliefs and practices that they have appropriated have been applied in a distinctly modern situation, which has provided these tools with new meanings, as jihadists' views on, for example, the jihad, the *umma* and the caliphate illustrate. Hence, although jihadism is often presented in essentialist terms as following the pure, timeless and universal Islam of the *salaf*, it is actually ambiguous, dynamic and produced by the specific contexts in which it has been constructed.

By presenting itself as genuinely Islamic, but at the same time having adapted Muslim traditions to their modern, global and local contexts, jihadism can be attractive for people with divergent backgrounds in different places around the world. It may enable young Muslims to construct their own beliefs by accessing the Islamic sources themselves and selecting those tools that fit their own backgrounds and experiences. It facilitates them to overcome local and cultural differences and to construct a strong Muslim identity as members of the community that claims to follow the pure Islam of the Prophet and defend Islam against unbelief. Hence, it may empower them, even to such an extent that they are willing to leave their families and devote their lives to the jihad.

The jihadist message thus both expresses and produces the heterogeneous composition of the movement. The question remains, however, how jihadists, and particularly jihadist leaders, have participated in the construction of jihadism. How did this hybrid ideology come about, and how has it been publicised? For this purpose, we will now turn to jihadist media.

4 Jihadism and media

Social movement scholars have emphasised that contemporary social movements can hardly be understood without taking the involvement of media into account. Since the movements often lack other resources and opportunities to bring their message to the fore, the use of new communication and information technologies has become crucial. As a result, social movements and media have often become closely connected.

This chapter therefore analyses the role of jihadists' media usage in the development of jihadism. First, it explores the context of jihadist media use (4.1), after which jihadists' media usage itself is discussed and embedded in its historical context (4.2). By then relating jihadist media to the development of the jihadist movement (4.3) as described in the previous chapter, this chapter argues that media and jihadism are strongly intertwined and co-evolving. As noted in the introduction, al-Qaeda's media usage and its media producer al-Sahab have hardly been studied in a thorough manner. By embedding al-Qaeda and al-Sahab in the broader jihadist movement, this chapter therefore provides the necessary backdrop for analysing the specific contents of jihadist media productions in the subsequent chapters.

4.1 New media and Muslim movements

In the Muslim world, minority and opposition movements have taken the ample opportunities provided by new media technologies to circumvent their exclusion from national mainstream media, which has been largely under state control since the 1950s.[1] By innovatively using and combining several kinds of new media, they have been able to bypass censorship and communicate with their support.

In the first place, besides widespread means such as books, treatises, periodicals and leaflets, opposition movements have employed small media and put them to new uses.[2] In the 1970s, audio cassettes became an important technology for clandestinely spreading ideas, the most famous example of which are the cassette sermons of the then exiled Grand Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989), which were successfully smuggled into Iran and distributed there.[3] Other opposition leaders

[1] Instigated by the success of Nasser's transnational radio service *Voice of the Arabs* in the 1950s and 1960s, most Arab regimes took charge of the traditional mass media. Newspapers, radio and television were centralised or closely monitored, and criticisms of the regimes were hardly ever tolerated. For an overview, see William A. Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio and Television in Arab Politics* (Westport 2004).

[2] For some examples, see Eickelman, *Muslim Politics*, 121-31.

[3] Cf. Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis 1994).

followed his example, such as Hezbollah's Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935-2010) and the Saudi cleric Salman al-'Awda (b. 1955). Another media technology to send messages meant for further distribution have been faxes, which were often used by Saudi opposition groups such as the Saudi group The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights, which sent thousands of faxes from London to Saudi Arabia where the messages were further distributed.[4] Often in combination, small media like these have enabled opposition groups to build their own publics.

Besides small media, the emergence of transnational, pan-Arab media has provided new opportunities for groups banned from the traditional mass media. Since the 1980s, international Arabic newspapers have become increasingly influential. Initially based in Europe, newspapers such as *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (1978), *al-Hayat* (refounded in 1988) and *al-Quds al-'Arabi* (1989) have reached more and more Arabs all over the world. Even more importantly, transnational satellite-stations were set up.[5] In 1996, Al Jazeera was established in the Gulf state of Qatar, and soon it would become the most influential television station for Arabs both in the Arab world and in the diaspora. Due to its exclusive access to Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, Al Jazeera would definitively establish itself during the U.S. bombing campaign in the aftermath of al-Qaeda's embassy attacks in 1998. The coverage of the Second Intifada since 2000, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the war in Iraq since 2003 further enhanced the channel's reputation in the Arab world.[6] Other stations, foremost among them al-'Arabiyya, would follow Al Jazeera's example, but have never equalled its influence among the Arab viewers. In contrast to the state dominated media, these new media did not refuse to give a stage to critical voices. The controversial Egyptian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), for example, got his own programme on Al Jazeera called *al-Sharia wa-l-Hayat* ('Sharia and Life') and thus reached millions of Arabs all over the world. Other groups used the available technology to set up their own satellite stations, as did Hezbollah and Hamas with al-Manar (2000) and al-Aqsa (2006), respectively.

Yet the largest opportunity for social movements in the Arab world, and the greatest challenge for the regimes, has become the Internet. Within a decade after the first Arab country, Tunisia, had joined the World Wide Web in 1991, public access was allowed in all Arab states. Although most regimes have attempted to censor sensitive issues on the Internet and the access in most Arab countries is still relatively low, the impact of the rise of the Internet has been enormous.[7] Moreover,

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[4] On the Saudi opposition's use of media, see Mamoun Fandy, 'Cyber Resistance: Saudi Opposition between Globalization and Localization', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999) 124-47.

[5] For an overview, see Naomi Sakr, *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalisation and the Middle East* (London 2001).

[6] On Al Jazeera, see Miles, *Al-Jazeera*; Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York 2006); Khalil Rinawi, *Instant Nationalism: McArabism, al-Jazeera and Transnational Media in the Arab World* (Lanham/Oxford 2006); Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds: The Coalition, al-Jazeera and Muslim Public Opinion* (London 2006).

[7] Exceptions concerning the relatively low Internet usage are the Gulf States, Morocco and Tunisia. For statistics on Internet usage in the Arab world, see the International Telecommunication Union at www.itu.int, last accessed January 2014. See also Bunt, *iMuslims*, 55-64.

in the twenty-first century, the number of Internet users in the Arab world has strongly increased. Internet cafés have rapidly emerged, and especially the younger generations have made extensive use of the new technologies that are hard to censor. Hence, for political activists and opposition movements, the Internet has provided an excellent opportunity to represent themselves. Organisations such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood have established extensive, multi-lingual websites, and other groups and leaders have used the Internet to publish specific communiqués, fatwas, audio and video messages.[8] As a multimedia platform, the Internet has supplemented, and in some cases replaced, the small media that were used before. Due to its decentralised, interactive and anonymous character, it has provided a useful platform for those who were excluded from the traditional mainstream media in the Muslim world.[9]

The use of several kinds of small media, pan-Arab media and the World Wide Web has significantly reduced the states' ability to control the media. New actors were able to claim a public voice and new publics emerged along the continuum between personal communication and transnational mass media. On local and regional levels, alternative publics emerged around the media activities of movements such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Saudi opposition. On a transnational level, pan-Arab media merged various publics and facilitated the rise of transnational arenas for public debate.[10] Hence, the emergence of new media technologies went together with a proliferation of publics, which were less unified and territorially defined than the traditional public sphere, and separated by symbolic boundaries, such as language or political and religious convictions, more than geographical ones.[11]

4.2 Jihadist media

4.2.1 From al-Jihad to Al Jazeera

Jihadism has been both a product and agent of these developments. Jihadists have always eagerly embraced new media technologies whenever they became available. They have followed the paths that were developed by movements such as the ones mentioned above, but also instigated and popularised new media practices. Since the fights against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, jihadists have sophisticatedly employed several kinds of media to present themselves to the

[8] See www.palestine-info.info, www.moqawama.org and www.ikhwanonline.com, respectively, last accessed January 2014.

[9] Gabriel Weimann mentions nine advantages of the Internet for 'terrorist' organisations, which are also applicable to other movements operating in secrecy: easy access; little or no regulation, censorship or control; potentially huge audiences; anonymity; fast flow of information; inexpensive; multimedia environment; interactivity; ability to shape coverage in traditional mass media. Cf. Weimann, 'Virtual Disputes: The Use of the Internet for Terrorist Debates', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006) 623-39 at 624.

[10] See, for example, Mark Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York 2012), on the crucial role of media in the Arab uprisings since late 2010.

[11] Cf. David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London 1995) 1; Eickelman, *New Media*, 14-6; Meyer, 'Introduction', 11-5.

audiences in their home countries as well as abroad. The major propagandist of the battles against the Soviets was undoubtedly the Palestinian 'Azzam. In search of sponsors and recruits, 'Azzam repeatedly left Pakistan and Afghanistan to travel around in the Middle East, Europe and the United States to preach the jihad and establish international branches of his Services Bureau. He fully exploited his talents as a gifted speaker, but also tried to awaken the interest of the people for the jihad in passionate writings such as *Defence of the Muslim Lands* (1979) and *Join the Caravan* (1987), which circulated widely among sympathisers in the Arab world.[12] Moreover, in 1984, 'Azzam founded the Arabic magazine *al-Jihad* in order to bring news about the Afghan Arabs to the Middle East.[13] The magazine was sponsored by Bin Laden, who, after his arrival in Pakistan, also started to actively participate in the mujahidun's media activities by inviting journalists and photographers to the battlefront and requesting the Egyptian film-maker Essam Deraz to make a documentary about the war.

After the Afghan war, the jihad was continued in other places, and, just as the battlefields, jihadists' media activities multiplied. From Algeria, Egypt and Libya, magazines were published such as the Armed Islamic Group's *al-Ansar* ('The Helpers'), the Egyptian Islamic Jihad's *al-Mujahidun* and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's *al-Fajr* ('The Dawn'), respectively. Besides, audio cassettes were released in increasing numbers from warzones such as Bosnia, the most famous example of which is *In the Hearts of Green Birds*, an audio tape commemorating foreign Muslim fighters who were killed in the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995.[14] In addition to these activities by jihadists fighting at (the borders of) the Muslim world, an increasing number of jihadists started to propagate the jihadist cause from Europe. London in particular became an important centre for jihadist organisations and thinkers such as Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and Abu Hamza al-Masri (b. 1958), who became vital nodes in the propagation of the global jihad. From his office in London, al-Suri assisted with the production of all three of the above-mentioned periodicals. Moreover, he founded a media centre called Bureau for the Studies of Islamic Conflicts, by means of which he acted as an intermediary between jihadist organisations and Western news agencies such as Reuters and CNN.[15]

The spread of the jihad from Afghanistan was also reflected in al-Qaeda's media activities, which increasingly aimed at global audiences. Bin Laden too, set up a media office in London, called the Advice and Reform Committee, which was headed by Khalid al-Fawwaz (b. 1962). Moreover, Bin Laden started to give interviews to Western media, the first of which was to Robert Fisk of *The Independent* in 1993.[16] Four years later, al-Suri arranged Bin Laden's first televised appearance: an

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[12] 'Azzam, *Al-Difa' 'an Aradi al-Muslimin Ahamm Furud al-A'yan* ['Defense of the Muslim Lands: the First Obligation after Faith'], 1987; Idem, *Ilhaq bi-l-Qafila* ['Join the Caravan'], n.d., both available at www.tawhed.ws (Arabic) and www.religioscope.com (English transl.), last accessed January 2014.

[13] For extracts, see Bergen, *Osama bin Laden*.

[14] The well-known audio recording (Azzam Publications, *In the Hearts of Green Birds: the Martyrs of Bosnia*, n.d.) is widely available on the Internet, see, for example, www.archive.org, www.islamicawakening.com and www.youtube.com, last accessed May 2013.

[15] Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, 149-81.

[16] Fisk interviewed Bin Laden again in 1996 and 1997. For his account, see several passages in his *The Great War for Civilisation: the Conquest of the Middle East* (New York 2005).

interview with Peter Arnett and Peter L. Bergen of the CNN.[17] But the al-Qaeda leader also quickly grasped the opportunities provided by the pan-Arab newspapers. The Declaration of War, for example, was faxed to the London-based *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, which published the text in August 1996. Three months later, Bin Laden gave an interview to Abdel Bari Atwan of the same newspaper, and, in February 1998, *al-Quds al-'Arabi* also published the fatwa 'Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders' of the so-called World Islamic Front, an umbrella organisation including al-Qaeda and, among others, al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad.[18] Yet the primary media corporation used by al-Qaeda would soon become, quite understandably, the influential Al Jazeera. Briefly after the satellite channel had established its reputation during the bombings in Afghanistan in 1998, Bin Laden already gave his first interview to its reporters. Moreover, in the years following the 9/11 attacks, Al Jazeera would repeatedly receive video tapes from the 'media production company' that had been established to coordinate al-Qaeda's media activities: al-Sahab.

4.2.2 Al-Sahab

A possible reason for the formation of al-Sahab could be that Bin Laden's hosts in Afghanistan, the Taliban, banned Bin Laden from giving any more interviews after they had become increasingly embarrassed by his public appearances on international television stations.[19] A different reason for establishing al-Sahab could be the internal criticisms of al-Qaeda's public relations strategies. In June 2000, a certain Abu Hudhayfa sent a long letter to Bin Laden in which he criticised the lack of publicity concerning the jihadists' role in the Battle of Moghadishu (1993) and the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania (1998).[20] A new information department should publicise jihadists' violent actions, Abu Hudhayfa argued, and, because of their psychological impact and capability to mobilise the youth, this department should emphasise 'martyrdom operations' in particular. He suggested that the executors of these operations could play an important role in this respect. 'How nice

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[17] For Bergen's account of the meeting, see several passages in his *Holy War* and *Osama bin Laden*.

[18] Cf. World Islamic Front, *Biyan al-Jabha al-Islamyya al-'Alamiyya li-Jihad al-Yuhud wa-l-Salibiyyin* ['Statement of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders'], *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 23 February 2008, available at http://www.library.cornell.edu (Arabic and Egnlish transl.), last accessed January 2014.

[19] Not only were the Taliban rather reserved concerning media usage in general (cf. International Crisis Group, 'Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?', *Asia Report* 158, 24 July 2008), they were also embarrassed by the fact that Bin Laden gave interviews and press conferences from camps of which the Taliban denied the existence. The Taliban subsequently forbade any more interviews and reportedly even confiscated his means of communication. Cf. Bergen, *Bin Laden*, 234 and 292-3. For the tensions between the Taliban and Bin Laden concerning Bin Laden's interviews, see also an e-mail to the latter that was obtained by Alan Cullison, 'Inside al-Qaeda's Hard Drive', *The Atlantic Online*, September 2004, at www.theatlantic.com, last accessed January 2014.

[20] The letter was discovered by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan in late 2002. The Arabic original, as well as an English translation, is available at the Combating Terrorism Center website, cf. 'A Memo to Sheikh Abu Abdullah', 20 June 2000, Harmony Database, AFGP-2002-003251, at www.ctc.usma.edu, accessed January 2014.

would it be', Abu Hudhayfa wrote, 'if in the future the brother is videotaped before the execution of an operation while he is giving an inciting speech to the *umma*, and then this speech is published after the operation is carried out successfully, God willing, similar to what Hamas is doing.'[21]

It went just as Abu Hudhayfa had envisioned. Less than four months after he had written his letter, the Yemeni Fahd al-Quso (1974-2012) was ordered to videotape the suicide attack on the USS Cole in the port of Aden for a propaganda video.[22] Although al-Quso overslept and the recordings never took place, one of Bin Laden's confidents, the Yemeni 'Ali Hamza al-Bahlul (b. 1969), produced a video about the attack some months later, on command of Bin Laden himself. The almost two-hour long video *The Destruction of the American Destroyer USS Cole* was shown in the training camps in Afghanistan in the summer of 2001 and, according to al-Bahlul's Guantanamo Files, it signalled the start of Bin Laden's media department, which would eventually develop Hamas' farewell videos into the more comprehensive genre of martyrdom videos.[23]

Al-Sahab has produced hundreds of videos and audio recordings since its establishment in late 2000 or early 2001. The videos consist of several genres, dominant among them have been leaders' statements.[24] These videos, the most well-known of them being Bin Laden's statements in the months after 9/11, consist of speeches and statements of high-ranking jihadists as well as, incidentally, interviews with them.[25] Besides, al-Sahab has produced so-called operational videos, consisting of footages of jihadists during fights and attacks, such as the *American Inferno in Khorasan* series, featuring several kinds of battles and attacks by jihadists in Afghanistan.[26] The most sophisticated of al-Sahab's videos are the so-called 'produced videos' that focus on 'martyrs'. Some of these videos pay tribute to jihadists who were killed during fights, such as the video *The Martyrs of Confrontations in the Land of the Two Holy Places*, which acclaims 'martyrs' who were killed by Saudi government forces.[27] Yet most videos about 'martyrs' deal with suicide bombers and thus fall under what I have called 'martyrdom videos'. The

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[21] Abu Hudhayfa, 'A memo to Sheikh Abu Abdullah', 7 (Arabic) or 3 (English).

[22] Interestingly, al-Quso was also known as Abu Hudhayfa. Probably this was a coincidence, since Abu Hudhayfa is a rather common nom de guerre referring to one of the Companions of the Prophet who was killed in battle. On the (designated) cameraman, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming* Tower, 320.

[23] JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment, ISN US9YM-000039DP, 15 November 2007, 8, available at www.wikileaks.ch, last accessed January 2014. For the video, see al-Sahab *The Destruction of the American Destroyer USS Cole* (2001), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[24] The genres of jihadist videos have been classified in various ways, see Intelcenter, 'Jihadi Master Video Guide, v1.1', 18 May 2006, 6-8; Salem, 'Multimedia Content Coding and Analysis', 610; Finsnes, 'Audio-Visual Jihadi Propaganda', 17-27.

[25] See, for example, al-Sahab, *Al-Sahab's Interview with Ayman al-Zawahiri* (Jan. 2005); *Hot Issues: Al-Sahab's Second Interview with Ayman al-Zawahiri* (Sep. 2006); *Ayman al-Zawahiri's Third Interview* (May 2007), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[26] Cf. Al-Sahab, *American Inferno in Khorasan: Bombing an American Base in Barmal District* (Jul. 2006), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[27] Al-Sahab, *The Martyrs of Confrontations in the Land of the Two Holy Places* (Dec. 2003), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

creation of this novel genre vividly illustrates jihadists' innovative media usage and al-Sahab's pioneering role therein.

Since the rise of the phenomenon of suicide attacks in the 1980s, videos have been used to publicise the attacks.[28] Inspired by the success of the written or audio-taped testaments of martyred Iranian soldiers during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, Lebanese organisations started to record video messages of the men and women who were selected to execute a suicide attack.[29] After the attacks had been successfully performed, these farewell videos or video testaments were distributed and broadcast on local television channels. Due to the success of the Lebanese farewell videos, the practice was taken over by Palestinian organisations.[30] Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine produced videotaped wills of their suicide bombers and, since the al-Aqsa Intifada, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades as well. Usually, these were brief videos in which the future bombers read out their testaments in front flags and images, often carrying a rifle and wearing a bomb belt. Characteristic elements of the farewell messages included the introduction of the 'martyr' and his or her organisation, a motivation for the suicide attack and a brief personal message to relatives and friends. Together with posters, eulogies, web pages and even calendars, these videos were used to enhance the status of 'martyrs' in Palestinian society, and thereby the status of their organisations.[31]

From Palestine, the practice of releasing farewell messages accompanied the spread of suicide attacks to other places, such as Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq. Meanwhile, al-Sahab had pioneered a new kind of farewell message: martyrdom

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[28] Some other reasons for recording farewell videos in the 1980s and 1990s have been mentioned, such as increasing the psychological pressure on the future bombers and promoting a 'culture of martyrdom' in order to facilitate the recruitment of new bombers. Cf. Assaf Moghadam, 'Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2003) 65-92 at 85; Ariel Merari, 'Social, Organizational and Psychological Factors in Suicide Terrorism', in Tore Bjørgo (ed.), *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality and Ways Forward* (London 2005) 70-86 at 80; Pape, *Dying to Win*, 82; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 178-9.

[29] On the Iranian testaments, see Werner Schmucker, 'Iranische Märtyrertestamente', *Die Welt des Islams* 27 (1987) 185-249.

[30] The success of the Lebanese videos can be illustrated by the example of Sana'a Mhaydali (1968-1985), who is believed to have been the first woman to have carried out a suicide attack. In 1985 this member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) carried out a suicide attack in southern Lebanon. Soon thereafter a video testament was released, showing the seventeen-year-old girl in military uniform with a red beret declaiming her farewell message in front of a flag with the emblem of the SSNP. Due to this video, the 'bride of the south', as she was called, became a national heroine who is remembered until today. This became clear when Israel handed over Mhaydali's remains to Lebanon as part of Operation al-Redwan in July 2008: they were received and buried with festivities and celebrations. Moreover, Mhaydali's video is still shown on the website of the SSNP (www.ssnp.com, last accessed January 2014) and is watched tens of thousands of times on Youtube. See also al-Manar TV, '"Bride of the South" back to the South', available at www.youtube.com, last accessed April 2014; Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 147-148.

[31] Cf. Pieter Nanninga, 'Geweld als theater: Palestijnse zelfmoordaanslagen en de profilering van Hamas en Fatah' [Violence as Theatre: Palestinian Suicide Attacks and Self-Representations of Hamas and Fatah], MA-thesis University of Groningen, 2007.

videos. These videos differed from their Lebanese and Palestinian predecessors on significant points. First, the farewell statements by the 'martyrs' were usually much longer than before: instead of several minutes, the men's messages in al-Sahab's videos last approximately half an hour on average.[32] Furthermore, the stage of the recordings changed significantly; from the standardised amateurish-looking Lebanese and Palestinian sets to a variety of sceneries in al-Sahab's videos. Some suicide bombers, such as the 9/11 hijackers, were recorded while reading their message from behind a desk, whereas more recent videos also show them somewhere in the open air while being interviewed or speaking freely to the camera. Finally, and most importantly, the testaments were not published separately as was the practice in the 1980s and 1990s, but incorporated into much more extensive and professionalised videos.

For composing the new genre, al-Sahab roughly combined four pre-existing genres. First, it included the traditional genre of farewell messages, though in a novel style as we just noted. Second, it added martyrdom biographies or eulogies. This genre had previously existed mainly in written form. Although comparable martyrologies are already present in the early Islamic sources, al-Sahab's biographies more closely resemble the stories about the Afghan Arab 'martyrs' that had been popularised by 'Azzam in the 1980s and thereafter spread to other regions, as *In the Hearts of the Green Birds* from Bosnia illustrates. Third, al-Sahab borrowed from the genre of operational footage, which had been developed during the First Chechen War (1994-1996) to publicise attacks on the Russians. Since 2000, these videos also included leaders' statements, Quran recitations and *nashids*, elements that al-Sahab also adopted.[33] Fourth, al-Sahab appropriated the mainstream genre of documentary film. As will be further explored in chapter 7, it included lengthy scenes in which the jihadist cause is presented by a combination of voice-overs and different kinds of footage, reminiscent of mainstream documentaries produced by Western as well as Arab media outlets.

In sum, al-Sahab combined several traditional and new speech, writing and film genres into one video, thus creating the new genre of the martyrdom videos which would be copied by dozens of other jihadist (and non-jihadist) media producers. The creation of this new genre therefore illustrates al-Sahab's leading role within the jihadist movement in the years after 9/11. This role can partially be explained by the quality of al-Sahab's releases, which was unsurpassed in the first half of the 2000s. Yet the worldwide attention for al-Qaeda and, in its footsteps, al-Sahab's media releases in the years after 9/11 was evidently more crucial. The martyrdom videos, and especially those featuring the 9/11 attackers, reached an enormous audience, also because they were published through Al Jazeera.

Yet, in late 2004 or early 2005, al-Sahab decided to change its way of releasing videos, mainly because Al Jazeera often only showed parts of the videos. Al-Sahab

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[32] The longest farewell message in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos is that of Ahmad al-Haznawi (1980-2001), one of the Saudi hijackers of the 9/11 attacks, which takes about 43 minutes. Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Martyrs of New York and Washington: Ahmad al-Haznawi* (April 2002), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[33] The most famous example of these videos is the series *Russian Hell*. See for example Sawt al-Qoqaz, *Russian Hell in Chechnya: Part 3* (2000), available at www.youtube.com, last accessed April 2014.

started to publish its productions directly on the Internet, which strongly reduced its audience. Nevertheless, al-Sahab was still able to reach the Muslim youths it primarily aimed at by following methods of online publishing that had been pioneered by other jihadist organisations and, not unimportantly, individuals.

4.2.3 From azzam.com to YouTube

The student Babar Ahmad (b. 1974) from London was responsible for launching one of the first jihadist websites.[34] Under the name of Azzam Publications, he established the English-language website azzam.com in late 1996. In sections such as 'jihad news' and 'jihad stories' and in a photo and a video gallery it provided, according to the site, 'information about Jihad and Mujahideen everywhere.'[35] The site's main area of attention was Afghanistan, but Bosnia and Chechnya were also broadly covered. For example, Azzam Publications offered a transcript of the audiocassette *In the Hearts of the Green Birds* and, in 1997, it released the much celebrated 150-minute video *Martyrs of Bosnia*.[36] Besides, many stories discussed the First Chechen War (1994-1996), and prominently visible on the site was a hyperlink to qoqaz.net, a site focusing on the war against the Russians in the Caucasus. Along these lines, azzam.com linked different struggles and presented them as part of the same global jihad. Although the site would disappear in late 2002, its impact as one of the first jihadist English-language websites has been enormous and its successors manifold.[37]

In the years following the launch of azzam.com, hundreds of websites offering jihadist contents appeared. Many of these websites were maintained by individuals or grassroots groups, often based in Europe and the United States. Others were founded by prominent jihadist thinkers and clerics, such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad ('Pulpit of *Tawhid* and Jihad').[38] Besides, many groups and organisations set up websites to release their communiqués, statements and audiovisual productions. Bin Laden's confidant and the first leader of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudi Yusuf al-'Ayiri (1973-2003), for example, ran the website alneda.com, which mainly (re)published releases of al-Qaeda's leaders and is, for that reason, often considered 'al-Qaeda's first website'. Yet Alneda also illustrates the difficulties jihadists experience in upholding their websites. After 9/11, the site was repeatedly attacked by means of denial-of-service

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[34] Cf. Craig Whitlock, 'Briton Used Internet as His Bully Pulpit', *The Washington Post*, 8 August 2005.

[35] An archived version of the site can be found at www.web.archive.org, last accessed January 2014.

[36] Azzam Publications, *Martyrs of Bosnia* (1997), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[37] Babar Ahmad was arrested in London in August 2004 and, after an eight-year-long legal battle, extradited to the United States in October 2012, where he is being held in custody without trial at the time of writing. On social media, several campaigns have been set up pleading for his release. Cf. www.facebook.com/FreeBabarAhmad; www.freebabarahmad.com; www.twitter.com/FreeBabarAhmad, last accessed July 2013.

[38] See www.tawhed.ws, last accessed April 2014.

attacks, after which it disappeared for a period and then showed up again at another URL. Finally, it shut down after al-'Ayiri was killed by Saudi forces in 2003.[39]

Because mother sites like Alneda appeared to be vulnerable to attacks and too dangerous for security reasons in the years after 2001, organisations started to develop new ways of delivering messages. Pioneering in this respect has been al-Zarqawi and his group of fighters in Iraq.[40] Less concerned with the opinion of the masses than al-Qaeda's leaders, al-Zarqawi did not use mainstream television channels to release his messages, neither did he establish extensive websites to publish his ideas and actions.[41] Rather, he drew the attention with provocative statements and horrific recordings that were released on jihadist web forums, after which they rapidly spread over the Internet and were, in some cases, even picked up by mainstream media. The action that marked the beginning of his pronounced online profile, for instance, was the beheading of Nicholas Berg in May 2004. The recording of the execution of the American businessman was distributed via the forum al-Ansar and quickly spread over the Internet, where it was soon discovered by mainstream media, thus reaching a huge audience and causing worldwide upheaval.[42] This strategy proved successful and, from that moment on, al-Zarqawi and his al-Qaeda in Iraq rapidly expanded their online presence, in some periods issuing an average of nine online communications a day.[43] At high speed they released statements, photographs, operational videos and sophisticated – though appalling – films, such as the 46-minute *All Religion Will Be for God*.[44] Although al-Zarqawi was killed in June 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq's releases would remain highly influential.

Following the example of al-Zarqawi, many organisations abandoned the strategy of maintaining fixed websites and focused on the production of separate media releases, which were distributed via web forums such as al-Ekhlaas, al-Hesbah and al-Ansar.[45] Forums like these were not so much dependent on maintenance by an organisation. Rather, they are based upon active participations of its members, who can post materials or links, comment on each other and engage in discussions without the interference of an organisation. The role of the organisations has therefore become restricted to (the outsourcing of) the production of a release and

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[39] Cf. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, 93-6; Akil N. Awan and Mina al-Lami, 'Al-Qa'ida's Virtual Crisis', *The Rusi Journal* 154 (2009) 56-64 at 56-8.

[40] On online activities in Iraq, see Rogan, 'al-Qaeda's Online Media Strategies', 69-86; Bunt, *iMuslims*, 243-63.

[41] Cf. Mark Lynch, 'Al-Qaeda's Media Strategies', *The National Interest*, 1 March 2006, 50-56 at 53-4.

[42] According to some reports, the video was downloaded half a million times within 24 hours after its release. Cf. Nadya Labi, 'Jihad 2.0', *The Atlantic*, July/August 2006, 102. See also Bunt, *iMuslims*, 248-51; Philip Seib and Dana M. Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-Al Qaeda Generation* (London 2011) 34-5.

[43] Atwan, *The Secret History*, 124.

[44] Al-Qaeda in Iraq, *All Religion Will Be for God* (June 2005), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[45] Cf. Brynjar Lia, 'Al-Qaeda Online: Understanding Jihadist Internet Infrastructure', *Jane's Intelligence Review* 18 (2006) 14-9; Idem, 'Jihadi Web Media Production: Characteristics, Trends, and Future Implications', paper presented at "Check the Web" Conference in Berlin, 26 and 27 February 2007.

sending it to trusted administrators or members of forums. They, in turn, make the release available on the forums, either by uploading the files or by providing dozens or even hundreds of links to free storage sites where the files can be downloaded by the forum visitors.[46] Subsequently, other people take care of further distribution by copying the files or links to other forums and by sharing them in chat rooms or e-mails. In this way, the release is spread from protected forums or chat rooms to more mainstream sites, sometimes even including popular platforms such as LiveLeak or YouTube. This 'viral jihad', as it is has been called, proved to be an effective way of distributing jihadist messages and would remain the leading way of releasing texts and audiovisual productions until today.[47]

Meanwhile, after the example of al-Sahab, other organisations had also established specialised media teams. After al-Sahab, the most influential of these media producers became the Global Islamic Media Front (*al-Jabha al-I'lamiyya al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya*, GIMF), which published material of several jihadist organisations, and al-Furqan Establishment for Media Production (*Mu'assasa al-Furqan li-l-Intaj al-I'lami*), which was established in 2006 by the newly announced Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella organisation of several Sunni groups. In addition, dozens of smaller and initially less active media groups were established, such as al-Buraq (Iraq), Labbyak (the Afghan Taliban), al-Andalus Media Production (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and Jundullah Media (the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). In contrast to al-Sahab, these media groups have not solely focused on audiovisual productions. Most groups also started to release online news reports, communiqués and magazines, such as *Sawt al-Jihad* ('Voice of the Jihad') and the English-language magazine *Inspire* of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula.[48] Even jihadist online

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[46] For practical and security reasons, anonymous free upload services such as www.rapidshare.com, www.simpleupload.net and www.uploadstube.de were used to store the files. Here, the files were uploaded by the administrators or trusted members of the forums, after which links to these files were posted on the jihadist forums. By following these links and using the password that was provided there, the visitors could obtain the video. However, once the free storage sites discovered the video files on their sites, they removed them. For that reason, the forums often provided dozens or even hundreds of links to the video files, in order to give the visitors more chances to download the video before their removal by the storage sites. Nevertheless, within a few days, all files were usually removed, after which jihadists uploaded them once more. This process could repeat itself until everyone interested in the files had obtained them.

[47] On the term 'viral jihad', see Bunt, *iMuslims*, 181-2. In addition, several so-called media distribution companies were established, either by jihadist organisations themselves or by individuals who started to cooperate. In contrast to the production companies, these groups devoted themselves entirely to the distribution of jihadist material on the web. The most well-known distributor was al-Fajr Media Centre (*Markaz al-Fajr li-l-I'lam*), which started in February 2006. Over the years, al-Fajr ('the Dawn') has built up a reputation for distributing authentic material on the web forums, which is why organisations such as The Islamic State of Iraq have increasingly outsourced the distribution of their releases to the Media Centre. Al-Sahab too, occasionally started to distribute its productions via al-Fajr. Cf. Rogan, 'al-Qaeda's Online Media Strategies', 66-7; Kimmage, 'Al-Qaeda's Media Nexus'.

[48] Several issues of *Sawt al-Jihad*, which first appeared in October 2003 and has been irregularly published since then, can be accessed at www.archive.org, last accessed March 2014. Until late 2013, a dozen of issues of *Inspire* have been published, which can be downloaded at www.jihadology.net, last accessed March 2014.

television channels and computer games emerged, such as *Sawt al-Khalifa* ('Voice of the Caliphate') and *The Night of the Capture of Bush*, respectively, which were both produced by the GIMF.

A consequence of the proliferation of media publishers and products in combination with the use of web forums was that competition between the different groups and organisations intensified. Hence, as we will further scrutinise in chapter 7, branding became ever more important. Yet the producers not only made a greater effort to increase their visibility on the forums and represent themselves as significant and reliable media producers, they also improved the user-friendliness of their products. They started to offer their releases in different formats, varying from DVD to cell phone quality. Moreover, they often released different language-versions of videos, which, besides the usually Arabic original, included versions with English, French, German, Turkish, Urdu and, in some cases, even Chinese subtitles. Although many releases were translated by the producers themselves, they were also often assisted by grassroots activists.

This extensive overview of jihadist media usage shows that jihadists have not only creatively combined the latest available media technologies since the 1980s, but that they have also contributed to the development of new media, for instance by introducing new genres or novel ways of distributing releases. While doing so, the role of jihadist groups and organisations in producing and distributing media transformed from a rather centralised, top-down approach in the 1980s and early 1990s to a strategy in which grassroots activities became increasingly important. This transformation strongly resembles the development of the jihadist movement itself since the 1980s. In the next section, we will explore the relationship between these developments by focusing on two processes in particular: the globalisation of the jihad and the evolution of the structure of the jihadist movement.

4.3 The mediatisation of jihadism

4.3.1 New media and the global jihad

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the global jihad gradually gained ground on the more nationally oriented struggles. In the 1980s, the so-called 'Muslim foreign fighters' were only a limited group that remained largely restricted to the Afghan Arabs fighting the Soviets.[49] Yet, partly due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War and failure of political Islam, Islamists and nationally oriented groups gradually shifted their focus during the 1990s and 2000s. New jihadist organisations were established and more and more men and women travelled abroad to participate in what became increasingly conceived as a global jihad.

The emergence and spread of the global jihad coincided with the rise of new media technologies.[50] I want to emphasise that these developments were not merely parallel, but strongly interrelated. At the beginning of this chapter, we have noticed that media such as faxes, audio and video tapes, transnational newspapers, satellite

[49] Cf. Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters'.
[50] Cf. Sageman, *Terror Networks*, 158-63.

stations and the Internet enabled new actors to claim a public voice and resulted in a proliferation of publics both within and beyond national boundaries. To provide a concrete example, it has been convincingly argued that Al Jazeera's coverage of the suffering of the Iraqi people under Saddam Hussein and Western embargos as well as the fate of the Palestinian people during the Second Intifada fuelled an Arab consciousness. It enhanced the Arab's self-conception of constituting a public that gathered around several issues of shared concern, such as the fate of the Iraqi's and Palestinians.[51] Hence, new media facilitated the creation of what has been called 'virtual neighbourhoods' and enabled people to identify with new forms of imagined communities that are less bound by territory.[52] Along the same lines, new transnational media also enhanced Muslims' identification with the imagined worldwide community of Muslims, the *umma*.[53] Jihadists profited from these developments, not only because they were the self-proclaimed defenders of the *umma*, but also because they were able to claim a public voice and, accordingly, to create their own transnational public.

This is vividly illustrated by a man who joined the global jihad at an early stage: the Yemeni Nasir al-Bahri (b. 1972). Al-Bahri was influenced by jihadist ideas while living in Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s, after which he joined the jihad fighters in Bosnia, Somalia and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, he met Bin Laden and reportedly became one of his bodyguards.[54] In March 2005, *al-Quds al-'Arabi* published an interview with al-Bahri, in which he told about his motivations for joining the global jihad. I quote him at length here, since he carefully describes his mounting identification with the *umma* and the role of media in this regard.

> The process of being influenced was not by jihad as thought, but at first the source of influence was the events affecting Muslims. Of course, I became religiously committed, praise be to God, in 1987. We were interested in every matter that concerns Muslims, and we followed events affecting Muslims in Islamic and other newspapers and magazines. At the time, we began to follow events in Afghanistan, the battles in Khost, and, after that, the fall of Kabul. We were also influenced by the sermons delivered by some speakers in the mosques in Jeddah about jihad in Afghanistan. The cassettes on jihad that influenced us most were those by Sheikh A'id al-Qarni. (...) The events in Kuwait that shook the Muslim world then followed. Immediately after that, we moved to the events in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and we saw the massacres and slaughtering of Muslims there. Of course, before all that and before we followed the events in Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina, we used to follow the events in Palestine. (...)
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> Thus our motivation in going forward and defending the honour of Muslims was not only chivalry and courage; there was a stronger religious drive. Add to that the instigation and call to jihad in the Friday sermons, the tape cassettes, the magazines that covered such events, and other media. I was greatly influenced by that and I wished I was one of those mujahidun defending Muslim lands. (...) We realised we were a nation [*umma*] that had a distinguished place among nations.

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[51] Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*.

[52] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis 1996) 195.

[53] Cf. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics*, 152-77, esp. 170.

[54] Tim Butcher, 'My Life in al-Qa'eda, by Bin Laden's Bodyguard', *The Telegraph*, 27 March 2008, at http://www.telegraph.co.uk, last accessed May 2013.

> Otherwise, what would make me leave Saudi Arabia - and I am of Yemeni origin - to go and fight in Bosnia? The issue of nationalism was put out of our minds, and we acquired a wider view than that, namely the issue of the *umma*. Although the issue was very simple at the start, yet it was a motive and an incentive for jihad.[55]

Al-Bahri repeatedly states that media had played a significant role in the development of his jihadist ideas, which went at the cost of 'the issue of nationalism'. Even in the pre-Al Jazeera era, he explicitly relates the newspapers, magazines, sermons and cassettes to his growing identification with Muslims in other regions and, as a result, with its defenders, 'the mujahidun'. The 'events affecting Muslims' were his main motivation for joining the jihad, he indicates in retrospect.

Relatedly, it is interesting to note that al-Bahri, in line with his identification with the *umma*, frames the several conflicts that he mentions in global terms. He merges the rather different struggles in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kuwait and Palestine by not viewing them as isolated events in different parts of the world, but rather as part of the global struggle between the *umma* and its adversaries. The territories themselves were not very significant, as becomes evident from the fact that he was influenced by the conflicts in Afghanistan and Palestine, but went to Bosnia instead – a place with no particular relevance for most jihadists. As a Saudi jihadist who also went to Bosnia in the early 1990s remarked: 'We were unable to understand where Bosnia was, was it in America or in the southern hemisphere or in Asia? We had no idea where it was. When we found out that it is part of Yugoslavia in Eastern Europe, we still had no idea of how many Muslims there were and we had no idea as to how and when Islam reached there.'[56] Yet the Saudi went, just like al-Bahri, because it was not the place that was relevant, but the fact that there were Muslims in need of help. Hence, just as media facilitated the identification with fellow Muslims in other places of the world, it also fuelled the idea that the different conflicts in the Muslim world were part of one and the same struggle for the sake of the *umma*. By offering news from conflicts in different parts of the Muslim world in one and the same newspaper, news bulletin or weblog, new, transnational media thus accelerated the rise of the global, deterritorialised jihad.[57]

However, it was not only mainstream media that contributed to the (perceived) merging of different conflicts in the Muslim world. As al-Bahri indicates, he was also 'greatly influenced' by jihadist media in which, as we have witnessed in the case of azzam.com already, the conflicts in the Muslim world were even more explicitly linked. This brings us to another important point: Jihadists have not only profited from new media as we noticed above, they have also contributed to their rise and spread. Jihadists have been able to create their own, transnational public consisting of people like al-Bahri, who might initially have become motivated by reports in the mass media about the deplorable situation of Muslims elsewhere, but eventually started to search for, select and consume jihadist media productions. Hence, jihadists have contributed to the usage of new media such as the magazines and cassettes al-

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[55] 'Al-Qa'ida from Within, as narrated by Abu Jandal (Nasir al-Nahri)', *Al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 20 March 2005, http://www.haverford.edu, last accessed January 2014. See also Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 63-5.

[56] Quoted in Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 48.

[57] Cf. Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 87.

Bahri refers to, and, later, the Internet.[58] Therefore, we should be aware not to consider the global jihad as a product of the rise of new media only. By further developing the already available technologies, spreading their usage and contributing to the proliferation of media publics, jihadists have also actively contributed to the changing media landscape. Jihadism and media thus appear to be intertwined and co-evolving.

4.3.2 New media and grassroots jihadists

The interrelatedness of media and jihadism has not remain limited to the spread of the idea of a global jihad. The usage of new media technologies also profoundly affected the organisational structure of the movement. Whereas media already played a role in the recruitment of new fighters in the 1980s and early 1990s, as the example of al-Bahri illustrates, the majority of jihadists still became involved in the movement through face-to-face contacts.[59] Accordingly, the movement had, at least to some extent, a hierarchic character and existed of a cellular network, the nodes of which existed of people who knew each other personally.[60] In the course of the 1990s, and especially after 9/11, the structure of the movement transformed significantly, a development that was at least partly due to the rise of the Internet. The fact that several authors use the Internet as a metaphor to describe the decentralised networked structure of the jihadist movement in the twenty-first century is a telling case in point.[61]

Jihadists' use of the Internet resulted in the increasing replacement of face-to-face contacts by virtual ties. To provide a concrete example, since the late 1980s, new al-Qaeda members had to take an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) in a meeting with Bin Laden or one of his lieutenants in an Afghan training camp to subscribe al-Qaeda's doctrine and recognise its leader's authority.[62] After the loss of the Afghan training camps in late 2001, this traditional practice of swearing loyalty to a Muslim leader was increasingly displaced to the World Wide Web. In November 2005, the prominent jihadist forum al-Hesbah offered its members the opportunity to take a *bay'a* to al-Qaeda's leaders online. Moreover, the oath was not only sworn online by

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[58] Another example is jihadists' contribution to the rise of Al Jazeera in the Arab world and beyond. As we have seen in Ch. 4.1, Al Jazeera rose to prominence in the aftermath of the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, when it had exclusive access to Taliban-led Afghanistan. Moreover, the channel achieved its global breakthrough after the 9/11 attacks, not only by its coverage of the subsequent war in Afghanistan, but also because of broadcasting Bin Laden's audio and video statements in the months after the attacks.

[59] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 109-11. Whereas al-Bahri emphasises the role of media, the possibility of face-to-face contacts should certainly not be excluded either. Several times in the interview, he points at the importance of mosques and the sermons and lessons he received there. Moreover, he continuously uses the first person plural throughout his narrative, thus suggesting that social contacts played a role in this case as well.

[60] Cf. Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*, 76-84; Sageman, *Terror Networks*, 137-73. That the rigidity of the network must not be overestimated, however, is convincingly argued in Leheny, 'Terrorism', 89-90.

[61] Cf. Leheny, 'Terrorism', 89-90; Weimann, *Terror on the Internet*, 25-6; Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, 260; Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 121; Bunt, *iMuslims*, 184-5.

[62] Cf. Bergen, *Osama bin Laden*, 81, 86, 102, 117, 138-9, 263, 323-5.

individuals, but also by organisations 'joining' al-Qaeda. In October 2004, al-Zarqawi's Tawhid wa-l-Jihad issued an online statement containing a *bay'a* to Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and in September 2006 the Algerian Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) did the same.[63] Whether actual ties between these organisations existed in the offline world was no longer very relevant: the statements of allegiance had a performative quality. Since their pledges of allegiance, Tawhid wa-l-Jihad and the GSPC have been perceived as part of 'al-Qaeda', as al-Qaeda in Iraq and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, respectively. Hence, the practice of taking *bay'a* shows that, partly as a result of the use of the Internet, the lines between the different jihadist organisations, groups and individuals became increasingly blurred. The jihadist movement became more diffuse and dynamic, and participation became a matter of perception and individual choice rather than recruitment, selection and official membership.

Strongly related to this point is another development within the jihadist movement in which the role of new media technologies is clearly visible: the increasing role of grassroots participants. Over the years, the control of leaders and organisations over the jihadist movement diminished, whereas grassroots initiatives became more important. In the 1980s and 1990s, these played a role in the distribution and circulation of jihadist media productions, such as magazines, books, audiocassettes and video tapes. The rise of the Internet strongly enhanced this development, as can be illustrated by the cases of Younes Tsouli and Samir Khan.

Younes Tsouli (b. 1983), a Moroccan-born Briton, became a famous contributor to jihadist Internet forums under his remarkable online username 'Irhabi007', referring to the Arabic word for terrorist (*irhabi*) and the British fictional secret agent James Bond.[64] From his home in London, the young IT student had joined jihadist web forums in 2003 and, because of his expertise, he rapidly became a well-known member of these forums. At the time al-Zarqawi started his online campaign in 2004, Tsouli was already a renowned contributor to, among others, al-Ekhlaas and al-Ansar. As a result, 'Irhabi007' soon came to the attention of al-Zarqawi's aides, who approached the then 20-year-old student and asked him to solve all kinds of technical problems and to assist them with the distribution of releases such as the film *All Religion Will Be for God*. Hence, from a mere forum member, Tsouli became a participant of one of the most remarkable online campaigns ever executed by jihadists. When Tsouli was arrested in 2005, many were ready to take his place, as they symbolically underlined by using aliases such as 'Irhabi 008' and 'Irhabi 009'.[65]

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[63] Tawhid wa-l-Jihad pledged allegiance to Bin Laden in the 21st issue of the online journal *Mu'askar al-Battar* (Camp of the Sword). A translation is available at www.jamestown.org, last accessed June 2011. On the GSPC's *bay'a*, see Manuel R. Torres Soriano, 'The Road to Media Jihad: The Propaganda Actions of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahreb', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23 (2011) 72-88 at 81-2.

[64] On Irhabi007, see Labi, 'Jihad 2.0'; Rita Katz and Michael Kern, 'Terrorist 007, Exposed', *The Washington Post*, 26 March 2006; Brian Krebs, 'Terrorism's Hook into your Inbox. UK Case Shows Link Between Online Fraud and Jihadist Networks', *The Washington Post*, 5 July 2007; Gordon Corera, 'Al-Qaeda's 007', *Timesonline*, 16 January 2008; Idem, 'The World's Most Wanted Cyber-Jihadist', *BBC News*, 16 January 2008.

[65] In 2005, Younes Tsouli was arrested in relation to another case. When the investigators inspected his computer, it became clear that they had accidentally caught one of the world's most wanted 'cyber-jihadists'. Two years later, Tsouli was sentenced to sixteen years in prison.

Another grassroots jihadist succeeding Tsouli was an individual calling himself 'Inshallahshaheed', which loosely translates as 'a martyr, God willing'. In 2005, Inshallahshaheed set up a web blog called 'The Ignored Puzzle Pieces of Knowledge', on which he sometimes presented his own thoughts on a certain topic, but mostly passed on texts, audio fragments and videos that he had found on other websites. As had been the case with Irhabi007, Inshallahshaheed's status in the online jihadist networks gradually increased. He gained the trust of webmasters of some of the most important jihadist media groups and forums and spread their words to the visitors of his own blog. Due to his online successes, however, Inshallahshaheed also attracted the attention of several journalists, as well as volunteer groups fighting 'cyber-jihadism'. The Jawa Report, a conservative forum monitoring terrorism-related issues on the Internet, started to investigate The Ignored Puzzle Pieces of Knowledge and its owner and repeatedly attacked the blog.[66] Yet it was *The New York Times* that was able to locate and identify the person behind the name Inshallahshaheed in October 2007.[67] It turned out to be a 21-year-old middle-class American named Samir Khan (1985-2011), who was living with his parents in North Carolina.

In 2009, The Ignored Puzzle Pieces of Knowledge suddenly disappeared, as did Khan. Some months later, once the second issue of the newly founded online magazine *Inspire* had been released, it became clear what had happened to the blogger. Under the title 'I Am Proud to Be a Traitor of America', Khan told his life story in the magazine. He had left for Yemen, he stated, where he, with support of the U.S.-Yemeni cleric Anwar al-'Awlaki (1971-2011), had become the editor and author of the flashy English-language magazine. 'I was al Qaeda to the core', he wrote about his online activities in the U.S.[68] Although he had no official position in the organisation and probably never met any of its leaders until that moment, his claim was not far besides the truth.[69]

The stories of Tsouli and Khan show that jihadism had become fully embedded in, what Henry Jenkins calls, 'participatory culture'.[70] Rather than passive media consumers, Jenkins argues, media spectators of today are active participants in the circulation and creation of new media content. Media consumption has shifted from

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[66] See the various posts on Inshallashaheed on http://mypetjawa.mu.nu, last accessed May 2013. Several times, The Jawa Report caused the blog's disappearance, after which it usually reappeared at another location. Between 2007 and 2009, the blog has appeared at, among others, http://ignoredknowledge.wordpress.com, http://inshallahshaheed.muslimpad.com, http://inshallahshaheed.wordpress.com and http://revolution.muslimpad.com. Finally, it ended up at the popular websites Thabaat (http://revolution.thabaat.net) and, after this one disappeared, at Ansar al-Mujahideen (http://revolution.ansar1.net), which were both run by a group of Dutch and Belgian Muslims.

[67] Michael Moss, 'An Internet Jihad Aims at U.S. Viewers', *The New York Times*, 15 October 2007.

[68] Samir Khan, 'I Am Proud to Be a Traitor of America', in Al-Malahim Media, *Inspire*, issue 2 (2010) 45-9 at 47.

[69] In September 2011, Samir Khan was killed together with Anwar al-Awlaki by an American airstrike in Yemen. His death raised severe protests, not in the last place because of his American citizenship.

[70] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York 2006) 2-3 and 244. See also Idem, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York 2006).

a mainly individual activity toward a networked practice, through which participants, as a way of collective intelligence, share and distribute information and circulate and recreate media content. These processes are clearly visible in the cases of these two youths, who shared and distributed media content on blogs and forums, but also created materials themselves such as magazines, blogs and video clips. Moreover, they demonstrate the blurring of the lines between media producers and consumers, which, according to Jenkins, is another characteristic of the participatory culture. Inshallahshaheed, for example, initially shared materials produced by the jihadist production groups on his web blog, but ended up as editor and author of a magazine of one of the most highly esteemed jihadist media producers themselves.

4.4 Conclusion

Jihadism is a distinctively mediatised movement. Spearheaded by al-Qaeda and its media producer al-Sahab, jihadists have eagerly embraced the latest media technologies, which have facilitated and accelerated transformations within the jihadist movement. Jihadists' media use has enabled and fuelled the emergence and spread of the idea of the global jihad and contributed to the transformation of the structure of jihadism from a somewhat centralised and hierarchic movement in the 1980s to the dynamic, diffuse and grassroots-centred movement of the twenty-first century. Hence, the rise of new media technologies and its use by jihadists have contributed to the globalisation, deterritorialisation and individualisation of jihadism. Yet new media have not simply impacted jihadism. Jihadists have also contributed to the spread of new media technologies and practices as well as to media-instigated processes such as the proliferation of publics, the blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers, and the enhancement of a participatory culture.

Thus, the development of media and the transformation of jihadism can hardly be separated. To provide a concrete example of their interrelatedness: Whereas the rise of new media has led to an increasing role of grassroots activists within the jihadist movement, grassroots activists have contributed to the adoption of new media by jihadist organisations, as was the case with jihadist organisations' reliance on websites that had been pioneered by individuals such as Babar Ahmad. The rising importance of grassroots activists thus coincided with the appropriation and refinement of new media technologies and practices – two developments that were mutually dependent on each other.

To relate these insights to our observations of the previous chapters, we have seen so far that external factors have played an important role in the rise and development of the jihadist movement. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the rise of the Taliban regime in the mid-1990s and the U.S.-led war against terror after 9/11 provided the movement with opportunities and restraints to mobilise its participants. Besides, processes such as globalisation, individualisation and the rise and spread of new media technologies have influenced the jihadist movement and offered opportunities to spread its message of the global jihad in defence of Islam. Yet, in the footsteps of social movement theorists, we should be aware of considering jihadism in purely reactive terms. Jihadists have also made deliberate choices in and

actively dealt with their specific circumstances. Their media usage provides a telling case in point. By sophisticatedly and innovatively using and combining several kinds of media, jihadists have been able to circumvent censorship and control and spread a message that can be attractive for people with rather divergent backgrounds, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

Jihadists' media usage thus illustrates one way in which jihadists have actively contributed to the construction of their movement, which should be kept in mind when discussing al-Sahab's martyrdom videos in part IV of this book. Yet their media use has become an even more powerful tool in combination with another kind of their public actions: suicide attacks.

PART III: SUICIDE ATTACKS

5 Orchestrating violence

Like jihadists' media releases, violence has publicised the jihadist cause. By approaching suicide attacks as performances, this chapter studies how jihadists in general and al-Qaeda in particular have orchestrated their violence to make an impact on the audience. In terms of performance theory, this chapter thus concentrates on the scripting of the attacks and on the ways in which the organisers have used issues such as staging and timing to signal what jihadism is about.

As social movement scholars have argued, social movements learn from each other's performances. They appropriate each other's forms of dramatised action and improvise on the available scripts for their specific purposes.[1] This chapter therefore starts with a historical overview of the use of suicide attacks in order to explore how this particular form of action has become part of the repertoire of contention in the 1980s and 1990s (5.1). Subsequently, it examines how jihadists, and especially al-Qaeda, have employed the script for performing suicide attacks and whether the tactical benefits of the means have played a role in this respect (5.2). Because the symbolic value of suicide attacks turns out to have played a more significant role in al-Qaeda's considerations, I proceed with analysing how jihadists have tried to orchestrate their violent performances to make an impact on the audience. For this purpose, I will specifically examine four suicide attacks that are featured in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos (5.3).

5.1 Suicide attacks: a historical sketch

5.1.1 From Beirut to 9/11

The modern phenomenon of suicide attacks has several historical precedents. Some authors have pointed at the Biblical Samson who, after being captured by the Philistines, prayed 'Let me die with the Philistines!' and then pushed apart the two central pillars in the temple where he had been exposed, causing the collapse of the building and thus killing more enemies at his death than during his entire lifetime (Judges 16:30). Others have mentioned the self-sacrifice of the Ismaili assassins (*hashashin*), who sowed terror between the eleventh and thirteenth century by assassinating their Seljuk, Crusaders and Sunni opponents in public in broad daylight, usually being killed or killing themselves afterwards.[2] The most important

[1] Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, 14-5.

[2] Cf. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 12-3; Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 23-5; Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, 10-1.

precedent, according to many authors, has been the thousands of Japanese kamikaze pilots who gave their lives as part of an organised campaign to stop the approaching American fleet during the final phase of World War II.[3]

Nevertheless, according to most scholars, the modern phenomenon of suicide attacks started on 15 December 1981, when a member of the Iraqi Shia organisation al-Da'wa killed dozens of people by crashing his bomb truck into the Iraqi embassy in Beirut, Lebanon.[4] Given the prominence of martyrdom traditions in Shiism and, more importantly, their recent revival by the Iranian revolutionaries (see Ch. 6.1.2), it was no coincidence that the strategy of 'martyrdom operations' was pioneered by (Iranian-backed) Shia organisations. Most prominent among these would soon become Hezbollah, which popularised the means in its attempts to liberate Lebanon from foreign military presence during the civil war. Fully in line with the views of the revolutionary regime in Iran, this resulted in suicide attacks on Israeli as well as Western forces in Lebanon.[5] Whereas most suicide attacks targeted the Israeli Defence Forces, the most spectacular ones were carried out against American and French troops. On 18 April 1983, a car bomb exploded at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people, and on 23 October of that year, simultaneous car bomb attacks on U.S. Marine barracks and a French military compound in Beirut killed 241 and 58 people, respectively. A few months later, U.S. President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) withdrew U.S. troops from Lebanon, a decision that was shortly followed by the French. Moreover, after dozens of suicide attacks against the Israeli Defence Forces in the following years, Israel too, decided to withdraw its troops in the course of 1985. As a result, suicide attacks were considered a winning strategy from their onset.[6]

Due to the perceived success of the bombings in Lebanon, groups that were engaged in armed conflicts elsewhere also adopted the means. In the late 1980s, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) adopted the strategy in their fights against the Sri Lankan army. Between 1987 and 2001, more than 140 Black Tigers carried out a suicide attack. Many of these had evident strategic objectives, such as assassinating high-profile Sri Lankan and Indian figures, among whom the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (1944-1991) and the Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premasada (1924-1993).[7] On a lesser scale, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) too, started to use suicide attacks since the escalation of its conflict with Turkey in 1996, and the same is true for the Chechens, who embraced the method during the Second

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[3] On the Kamikaze attacks, see Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 130-38; Peter Hill, 'Kamikaze, 1943-5', in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford 2005) 1-39.

[4] Despite striking resemblances, especially in the case of the (equally ritualised) kamikaze attacks, the above predecessors are usually excluded from the genealogy. This is partly due to the definitions that are used: the kamikaze attacks are seen as part of 'regular' warfare between national armies. Cf. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 10-3; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 11; Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 4; Assaf Moghadam, 'Defining Suicide Terrorism', 18.

[5] Cf. August Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton/Oxford 2007) 29-46.

[6] Cf. Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 52-78; Pape, *Dying to Win*, 129-39; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 45-54.

[7] Cf. Stephen Hopgood, 'Tamil Tigers, 1987-2002', in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford 2005) 43-76; Pape, *Dying to Win*, 139-62; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 71-86; Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 137-45.

Chechen War (1999-2000) and became particularly known for their use of female bombers, the so-called 'Black Widows'.[8]

More well-known and eye-catching were the Palestinian suicide attacks, not in the last place because most of their victims were civilians.[9] In Palestine, the strategy was pioneered by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the wake of the Oslo I Accord between the PLO and Israel in 1993. Both organisations had always resisted peace negotiations with the Israeli government and therefore fiercely resisted the Accord. However, because of the popularity of the treaty, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad could not engage in all-out resistance without losing their support.[10] They therefore adopted a strategy of controlled violence, comprising a restricted use of violence, including suicide attacks, on carefully chosen moments.[11] This pragmatic strategy enabled them to balance between their principles and the popularity of the peace process, which paid off after the process failed.[12] After the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, Hamas could claim that it had always resisted the negotiations, as a result of which it became increasingly popular among the Palestinian population. The support of Fatah and its leader, Yasser Arafat (1929-2004), in contrast, strongly declined, causing Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades also to resort to suicide attacks.

The above cases indicate that the script for performing suicide attacks has been developed in the 1980s and 1990s. The movements adopting the script improvised on it, for instance regarding the precise means of attack (e.g. car bombs, bomb belts), the actors that were used (e.g. male, female) and the targets that were chosen (e.g. military, political, civilian), thus adapting it to their specific purposes. These purposes seem comparable to a certain extent. In his ground-breaking study *Dying to Win: the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Robert A. Pape has argued that the organisations had similar strategic aims with their violence, namely to compel stronger and (usually) democratic enemies to withdraw their military forces from territory that these organisations considered to be theirs.[13] Other authors have nuanced Pape's thesis, claiming that it depicts a too one-dimensional view of the Lebanese, Tamil, Kurdish, Chechen and Palestinian cases. According to them, suicide attacks are not only used against external enemies, but fulfil certain functions within

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[8] Cf. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 162-6; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 86-95, 110-3 and 145-7.

[9] Cf. Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 24.

[10] Until mid-1997, more than 70 per cent of the Palestinians supported the Oslo I Accord, and between mid-1997 until the al-Aqsa intifada the support was approximately 60 per cent. See the public opinion polls conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre and the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research at www.jmcc.org and www.pcpsr.org, last accessed June 1013.

[11] Cf. Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York 2000) 49-82.

[12] To provide an example of Hamas' careful timing of its suicide attacks: their 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades carried out their first suicide attacks shortly after the massacre in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron in February 1994 by the Israeli colonist Baruch Goldstein (1956-1994), which enabled Hamas to present the attacks as reprisals for Israeli violence rather than an attempt to thwart the peace process. Actually, the attacks put pressure on the execution of the Oslo I Accord. The same pattern was visible in 1996, when Hamas executed a series of suicide attacks after the assassination of its bomb maker Yahya Ayyash (1966-1996).

[13] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 4.

the own community as well.[14] For example, they may enhance the prestige of an organisation within a society, and can therefore be used to compete with other groups for support among the population, as was the case in Palestine.[15] Hence, it was argued, suicide attacks are not just a tactical weapon against a strong opponent, but also a tool serving the organisations' domestic political interests.

Much can be said about these claims, for instance regarding the social meanings of the 'martyrdom operations' in their respective societies, which undoubtedly played a pivotal role as well.[16] Yet it cannot be denied that organisations have employed this dramatic form of action, at least to some extent, for strategic purposes. Thus, by the time al-Qaeda declared war against the 'Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places' in 1996, suicide attacks already had become part of the repertoire of action that was available to movements battling military superior enemies. Moreover, it had proven to be a strategically successful means for this purpose; not only against the enemy itself, but also to gain attention in the struggle for support. How does this relate to al-Qaeda's and jihadists' adoption of the means?

5.1.2 9/11 and beyond

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of suicide attacks increased dramatically.[17] In the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror', more and more groups and organisations adopted the strategy, which has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. The role of jihadists and especially al-Qaeda in this upsurge can hardly be overestimated.[18]

Al-Qaeda's leaders may have become convinced of the value of the means due to the perceived successes of the suicide attacks of their predecessors. They repeatedly refer to the Lebanese and Palestinian attacks in their statements, and, reportedly, jihadists even received training from Hezbollah in the 1990s.[19] Yet the influence of the Egyptian al-Qaeda members seems more significant in this respect. In the 1990s, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which would officially merge with al-Qaeda in 2001, had become infamous for their devastating attacks against the Egyptian

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[14] Cf. Bloom, 'Palestinian Suicide Bombing'; eadem, *Dying to Kill*.

[15] Cf. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 83-96; Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick, 'Terrorism, Signalling, and Suicide Attack', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (2004) 243-81 at 162; Pedahzur, *Suicide* T*errorism*, 44-45 and 58-67; Luca Ricolfi, 'Palestinians, 1981-2003', in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford 2005) 77-129 at 99-100; Shaul Shay, *The Shahids: Islam and Suicide Attacks* (New Brunswick/London 2004) 69.

[16] For the Palestinians, see for example Hafez, 'Dying to Be Martyrs'.

[17] Cf. Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 38-43.

[18] Cf. Yoram Schweitzer, 'Al-Qaeda and the Global Epidemic of Suicide Attacks', in Ami Pedahzur (ed.), *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (London/New York 2006) 132-51.

[19] See, for example, Bin Laden's statement that was broadcast by Al Jazeera on 26 December 2001, available at www.youtube.com, last accessed April 2014. An English translation is available in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 145-57. On the training received in Lebanon, see *9/11 Commission Report*, 61.

government, among which had been two suicide attacks.[20] It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the emir of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, al-Zawahiri, convinced Bin Laden and his associates of the value of the means.

Yet, whereas Bin Laden's precise motivations for adopting the means are hard to establish, it is evident that al-Qaeda has employed the tool in a rather innovative fashion. Its first suicide attack occurred some six months after it had reaffirmed its 1996 declaration of war against the U.S. by means of the 1998 fatwa on behalf of the World Islamic Front. Both statements had passed largely unnoticed until two simultaneous truck bombs destroyed the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on 7 August 1998. Soon, the attacks were attributed to Bin Laden and his associates, and within two weeks the al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan were struck by American missiles. With one Hezbollah-like simultaneous truck bomb attack al-Qaeda had put itself on the map.

Al-Qaeda's subsequent suicide attacks had a quite different character. In August 2000, a small bomb-laden boat struck the destroyer USS Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, killing seventeen American sailors. This type of attack is strongly reminiscent of the Japanese Shin'yo suicide boats that had been used against comparable USS Navy ships; a tactic that had been adopted by the LTTE in the early 1990s. Al-Qaeda's next attack too, bore resemblance to those carried out by Tamil Tigers, consisting of an assassination of the Afghan Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud (1953-2000), who had already survived numerous 'traditional' assassination attempts since 1975 and could hardly have been killed in another way. This attack on 9 September 2001 obviously anticipated the consequences of the event that was planned for two days later: the spectacular and hitherto unimaginable attack on enemy's soil.

Al-Qaeda's varied and innovative use of the script for performing suicide attacks definitely established its name and gave it a prominent position within the jihadist movement. Moreover, it set the example for jihadists throughout the world. Since 9/11, dozens of countries have witnessed suicide attacks, and although many of the organisers and perpetrators of these attacks somehow can be linked to al-Qaeda's leadership, especially in the first years after 9/11, the degree of instruction and facilitation by the latter has often remained unclear.

In Indonesia, (groups connected with) the Southeast Asian Jemaah Islamiya carried out several suicide attacks against targets associated with Westerners, such as nightclubs, resorts and hotels, since 2002. In Saudi Arabia, suicide bombers related to al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula have repeatedly committed suicide attacks since 2003, some of which against Saudi political and security targets, but the most eye-catching ones against Western compounds and oil-producing facilities. Jihadist suicide bombers have also attacked Western and Jewish targets in both Morocco and Turkey since 2003, and in Egypt several tourist sites and resorts were struck between 2004 and 2006. In Jordan, suicide bombers sent by al-Zarqawi attacked two hotels in Amman in November 2005, killing even more people than the London subway bombings a few months earlier, and in Algeria the emergence of al-

[20] With these attacks in 1993 and 1995, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad attempted to differentiate itself from its rival al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya Cf. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 141-3; Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 79-80.

Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in 2006 resulted in a number of suicide attacks, mainly against political and military targets.

Of all countries that have been hit by suicide attacks since 2001, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan were, by far, affected the most. In Iraq, more than one thousand suicide attacks have been carried out since 2003; almost half of all the suicide attacks ever committed since 1981. The large majority of these attacks were carried out by jihadists, most of them belonging to al-Qaeda in Iraq (or its predecessors and successors) and, to a lesser extent, Ansar al-Sunna.[21] Although the phenomenon reached Iraq only after the start of the America-led invasion of 2003, most jihadist suicide attacks have not targeted coalition forces. In particular since 2005, when the numbers of attacks sharply increased, most bombings have been directed against alleged 'collaborators': Iraqi police and military forces and, especially, Shia Muslims.

Afghanistan has witnessed a strong upsurge in the numbers of suicide attacks since 2005. The Taliban, primarily, has employed the means, even though the influence of Arab jihadists at this point cannot be denied. Jihadists themselves have also carried out suicide attacks in Afghanistan, but, more than in Iraq, these were aimed at coalition forces and Afghan soldiers and policemen. In neighbouring Pakistan, civilians were targeted in larger numbers, and again, particularly Shia Muslims were the victims of the violence. Initially, suicide attacks were mainly used here in relation to the Kashmir conflict, but, since 2003, Pakistani civilians, politicians, military and policemen have also been increasingly targeted. Yet, just as in Afghanistan, the perpetrators of the suicide attacks in Pakistan have often remained unknown and included both nationally-oriented groups as well as transnational jihadists.[22]

This overview shows that suicide attacks have been used in a wide variety of ways since 9/11. In contrast with the nationally oriented struggles of the organisations discussed in the previous section, jihadist suicide attacks had a thoroughly transnational character. This was even true for regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where the large majority of the suicide attacks were organised and carried out by non-Afghans and non-Iraqis, respectively.[23] Partly as a result of this, the 'globalised pattern of suicide attacks', as it has been called, cannot be ascribed general strategic objectives.[24] Whereas the role of organisations has remained important, their goals with the attacks were quite divergent in the different regions in which they were executed. Even within a single region attacks were carried out with divergent aims. The suicide bombings in Iraq, for instance, can neither be explained as a tactical means against an occupying power nor as a means to gain support among the local population. Rather, it has been convincingly shown that they had multiple objectives, among which have been sparking sectarian

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[21] Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 106-10.

[22] Cf. Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 152-8 and 179-86.

[23] Cf. Hafez, *Suicide Terrorism in Iraq*, 89 and 251-4; Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason A. Campbell, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 28 August 2008, 24, available at www.brookings.edu; Omid Marzban, 'The foreign makeup of Afghan Suicide Bombers', *Terrorism Focus* 3 (2006), available at www.jamestown.org, last accessed July 2013.

[24] Cf. Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 3-4.

violence and collapsing the emerging democratic order.[25] This raises the questions how al-Qaeda has used suicide attacks: have strategic and tactical considerations played a role in this respect?

5.2 The tactical value of suicide attacks

Given the possible influence of Hezbollah, Hamas and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad on al-Qaeda's decision to adopt suicide attacks, tactical considerations might well have played a role. Moreover, in their writings and statements, the al-Qaeda leaders frequently mention the tactical advantages of suicide attacks over other, more conventional types of violence.[26]

In his book *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, al-Zawahiri propagates suicide attacks as a cost-effective way of waging jihad. Jihadists must select their 'methods of attack' to keep up with the 'enormous increase in the numbers of enemies and the qualities of their weapons', he writes, and therefore they should 'concentrate on the method of martyrdom operations, because it is the most successful way of inflicting damage against the opponent and the least costly to the mujahidun in terms of casualties.'[27] Hence, suicide attacks are considered a profitable means to battle a military superior enemy. In addition, they are deemed useful because they have a strong psychological impact, as becomes clear from the same passage: 'The targets as well as the type and method of weapons used must be chosen to have an impact on the structure of the enemy and deter it enough to stop its brutality, arrogance and disregard for all taboos and customs. It must restore the struggle to its real size.'[28] Al-Zawahiri thus points at suicide operations' capability of creating fear among the enemy, which makes it an effective means in cases of asymmetrical warfare – a point he implicitly refers to by remarking that violence should 'restore the struggle to its real size'.

Al-Zawahiri demonstrates great awareness of the tactical benefits of suicide bombings, an awareness that can also be deduced from the innovative ways in which al-Qaeda has employed the means. Yet Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have repeatedly indicated that they consider suicide attacks particularly useful because they draw extraordinary media attention and therefore enable al-Qaeda to signal messages to the audience. In *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, al-Zawahiri refers to violence as 'the language' (*al-lugha*) that is understood by the West.[29] Bin Laden repeatedly expressed himself in comparable terms, for example regarding the 1998 embassy bombings:

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[25] Cf. Ibidem, 213-26.

[26] These tactical benefits are also often mentioned in scholarly literature, see for example Pape, *Dying to Win*, 27-33; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 27-9; Hafez, *Suicide Terrorism in Iraq*, 9-11 and 13-4; Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom*, 29-32.

[27] Al-Zawahiri, *Fursan tahta Rayat al-Nabi*, 220 (English transl.: Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 223).

[28] Idem.

[29] Idem.

> The important thing is not how many were killed in the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. What is important are the powerful messages (*al-rasa'il al-quwiyya*) that the blasts sent to the White House and the American people.[30]

Hence, the messages sent by the attacks were considered more important than their immediate targets. This was also true for the 9/11 attacks, which the al-Qaeda leader refers to as 'great signs' (*dalalat 'azima*) and as an operation that 'says' (*yaqulu*) something to America.[31] In the so-called 'confession video', in which he for the first time admitted his involvement in the 9/11 attack in a conversation with an unknown Sheikh, he states:

> Those young men [the nineteen 'martyrs'] said in deeds, in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed all other speeches made everywhere else in the world, speeches that are understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs, even by Chinese.[32]

The al-Qaeda leaders metaphorically describe suicide attacks as means of communication by calling them 'a language', 'messages' and 'speeches'. Thus, in addition to their cost-effectiveness and psychological impact, suicide attacks are employed to refer to something beyond their immediate targets: as symbolic violence that says something to the audience.

This audience not only comprises the enemy, but also al-Qaeda's (potential) supporters, as is illustrated by a letter from al-Zawahiri to the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, al-Zarqawi. As we have seen (Ch. 4.2.3), al-Zarqawi had become notorious for his violent actions, especially after he had published video recordings of the beheading of two Americans on the Internet in 2004. In the letter, which was intercepted about one year after these events, al-Zawahiri warns the Jordanian leader in Iraq that these 'scenes of slaughter' harm the jihadist cause, as the general audience disapproves of them. Al-Zawahiri advises his colleague that he should be more aware of the image that violence creates of the jihadist movement in the media, saying: 'We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our *umma*.' Thus, al-Zawahiri concludes, 'we do not need this.'[33] The attention caused by the beheadings did not fit the image of jihadism that al-Zawahiri wanted to convey to his (potential) supporters. Apparently, the attention caused by suicide attacks did.

It is therefore interesting to ask how jihadist leaders have used suicide attacks as symbolic violence. How have they orchestrated their performances in order to

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[30] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: The Manhattan Raid: Part 1* (Sep. 2006) 23", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014. The background of this remark was probably the fact that the vast majority of the hundreds of casualties of the attacks were local citizens.

[31] Bin Laden, Video statement, 26 December 2001 (English transl.: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 153 and 155).

[32] Bin Laden, Video statement, 13 December 2001, available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014 (English transl.: http://archives.cnn.com , last accessed July 2013).

[33] Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi dated 9 July 2005, the Arabic original as well as an English translation of which are available at www.ctc.usma.edu, last accessed April 2014.

make an impact on their audience? How have they used, changed and improvised the script in order to bring their messages about?

5.3 The symbolic value of suicide attacks

5.3.1 Staging and timing

In each performance, issues such as staging and timing are crucial to the symbolic statements made.[34] In the case of suicide attacks, it is therefore significant to analyse the symbolic meanings of issues such as the stages and times that are chosen. Do they refer to something beyond the death and destruction that is caused?

Staging of suicide attacks has everything to do with the targets that are selected. In general, three different kinds of targets of suicide attacks can be distinguished: high-value symbolic targets involving mass casualties, high-value human targets with the goal of assassination and deliberately lethal attacks targeting civilians.[35] It comes as no surprise that most of the suicide attacks of al-Qaeda and related groups belong to the first category: they have often targeted high-value symbolic buildings and structures that necessarily involve many casualties, thus ensuring huge media attention. This was illustrated by 9/11, but also in the following years, for example in Bali (2002), Djerba (2002), Mombasa (2002), Casablanca (2003), Istanbul (2003), Jakarta (2003), where symbolic targets associated with both Westerners and Jews or Israelis were hit. Meanwhile, more and more suicide attacks particularly aimed at striking civilians in the years after 9/11; a development that may illustrate the increasing decentralised character of the jihadist movement.[36]

The timing of suicide attacks is often based on practical reasons. The attack on the USS Cole, for example, was performed during a fuel stop of the ship. On other occasions the timing of the attacks (either in terms of years, days or hours) is a deliberate choice to make a symbolic statement. The 1998 embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania occurred on 7 August, which was exactly the same date as the start of Operation Desert Storm eight years before. The attacks thus clearly signalled resistance against the presence of American troops on the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, one of the organisers claimed that they planned to execute the attacks during Friday prayer, so that the 'good' Muslims attending the prayers in mosques would not be killed.[37]

In order to analyse the ways in which jihadists have used the script to perform their violence, I will now examine the staging and timing of four suicide attacks in more detail: the 2000 USS Cole attack, the 9/11 attacks, the 2003 Riyadh bombings and the 2008 Danish Embassy bombing in Islamabad, Pakistan.[38]

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[34] Cf. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of* God, 121-47.
[35] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 167.
[36] Cf. Kepel, *War for the Muslim Minds*, 140.
[37] This failed miserably, however, since most of the 244 victims were local Muslims. Cf. Kepel, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom*, 100.
[38] I have deliberately chosen four attacks that are the subject of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos and were carried out in different regions: Yemen, the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, respectively.

5.3.2 The 2000 USS Cole bombing

U.S. vessels had been a potential target for jihadist attacks for years already. In 1998, the Saudi 'Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri (b. 1965) had proposed to attack a ship in the port of Aden, which was attempted in January 2000 as part of the so-called Millennium plot.[39] However, the attack on the USS The Sullivans failed, since the bomb boat was overloaded with explosives and sunk. Nevertheless, the target was considered so suitable that another attempt was prepared. This time Bin Laden himself chose the target: the guided-missile destroyer USS Cole, a billion-dollar ship provided with the most modern technologies to intercept missiles and armoured to withstand chemical, biological and nuclear attacks.[40] In the morning of 12 October 2000, it was attacked by two men in a small boat. The explosion killed 17 crew members and ripped a hole in the ship, which would take almost two years to repair.

The attack not only demonstrated the effectiveness of suicide attacks in asymmetrical warfare, it also expressed the asymmetry between jihadists and their opponents. The USS Cole was a powerful symbolic target. It not only represented American military presence in the Muslim world, it was also one of its most advanced pieces of weaponry. This sharply contrasted with the limited supplies of the two young suicide bombers: a small fibreglass boat. The asymmetry between the target and the assailants gave the attack a strong symbolic character, mirroring U.S. military supremacy and jihadists' limited resources, respectively.

This was also realised by Bin Laden, who repeatedly exploited the symbolism of the strike in the years after the attack. At his son's wedding in Kandahar three months after the attack he recited a poem, saying:

> In Aden the youth have roused, revolted and destroyed
> A destroyer, even the brave might fear.
> She inspires horror in the harbour and the open sea.
> She goes into the waves flanked by arrogance, haughtiness and fake might,
> To her doom she progresses slowly, clothed in a huge illusion.
> Awaiting her is a dinghy, bobbing in the waves, disappearing and reappearing in view.[41]

The al-Qaeda leader thus clearly contrasts the giant destroyer with a boat so small that it disappears behind the waves. The dinghy, he implies, shows that America's power is vulnerable. Its superiority is 'fake might', an 'illusion'. Bin Laden further embroidered upon this symbolism in a statement that was recorded in one of al-Qaeda's training camps in the spring of 2001, explaining his audience that,

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[39] 'Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri had met Bin Laden several times before and officially joined al-Qaeda in 1998 by taking the *bay'a* to Bin Laden. Al-Nashiri soon became al-Qaeda's operational chief on the Arabian Peninsula and, after his capture in 2002, confessed to have masterminded the USS Cole attack – only after being seriously tortured in Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp though. Cf. *The New York Times*, 'The Guantánamo Docket: Abd al Rahim al Nashiri', at http://projects.nytimes.com; JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment, ISN US9SA-010015DP, 8 December 2006, at www.wikileaks.ch, last accessed January 2014.

[40] Cf. *9/11 Commission Report*, 152-3 and 190-1; Wright, *Looming Tower*, 319.

[41] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole 2*, 37-38". My translation of the poem is based on Lawrence, *The Looming Tower*, 333.

> God granted your brothers victory in Aden nine months ago, and they dealt a blow to the heart of American prestige. The striking of the Cole came as a success granted by God, striking not only the American military, but also the world's most modern piece of military equipment on the seas. And you heard how they used to describe it: it can fend off large numbers on many fronts - land, sea and air. But God made it rather easy for two young men who believed that what He has is better.[42]

According to Bin Laden, the attacks on a symbol of America's superiority thus showed that America's hegemony is an illusion, since God is more powerful than the most modern piece of military equipment. The 'group of Muhammad' confronted the 'group of the *kuffar*', as he described it in the proceeding of the above-mentioned poem, and the former achieved victory over the latter only within seconds.

Thus, the staging of the attack in the port of Aden provided it with meanings far beyond the immediate target itself. The attack was a powerful illustration of the battle that jihadists waged against the sole remaining world power and its allies. It showed the (potential) supporters of the jihadist movement that, with God's help, the faithful few could overcome their supposed superior adversary. The 9/11 attacks would multiply this message.

5.3.3 The 9/11 attacks

The 9/11 attacks were symbolic statements par excellence. They were 'violence in the nature of the image'; designed to make an impact on the millions watching the theatre.[43] Yet what were their intended messages?

The targets of the attacks were selected in 1999 already, when the 'plains operation', as 9/11 was initially called, was prepared by Bin Laden, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and al-Qaeda's military chief, Mohammed Atef (1944-2001). In 1995, they had already plotted an attack including planes. The so-called Bojinka plot encompassed the assassination of Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) and an air bombing of eleven trans-Pacific airliners, one of which was intended to crash into the CIA headquarters in Fairfax County, Virginia. Although the plot was discovered and abandoned, the idea to create an impressive spectacle by using planes crashing into buildings remained. It was discussed again in the spring of 1999, when Bin Laden, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Atef composed an initial list of targets consisting of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, the Capitol and the White House. During the preparations for the attacks, the White House was considered too complicated and therefore removed from the list.[44]

The targets were obviously symbolic. The 'Twin Towers', one of which had been targeted by a group related to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in 1993 already, were the tallest buildings in New York, dominating the Manhattan skyline and composing an international centre of business and finance. As the World Trade Center represented America's leading role in global commerce, the Pentagon, the Capitol and the White House symbolised U.S. military and political power, respectively. Hence, the selected

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[42] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 34".
[43] Cf. Jean Baudrillard, 'The Mirror of Terrorism', in Idem (ed.), *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, transl. James Benedict (London/New York 1993) 75-80 at 75.
[44] Cf. *9/11 Commission Report*, 155 and 243-4.

targets for 9/11 consisted of symbolic sites referring to America's world-leading political, military and economic position.

Like the Cole attack, the events of 9/11 symbolised that the U.S. may appear strong, but is actually vulnerable. The attacks questioned the power of the U.S. authorities, which had not been able to protect some of their most important public buildings and prevent an attack on their own soil; an attack by men who had dwelled there for months, who had rented houses and cars, taken flying lessons, repeatedly contacted al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan and were eventually able to board four different planes, taking them over and crashing them into three of America's most protected buildings. The targets of the 9/11 attacks thus not only signalled resistance to American politics and society, but also showed their vulnerability and undermined the government's authority.[45] Meanwhile, it symbolically demonstrated the power of the perpetrators, who had been able to simultaneously strike multiple places in the heart of the enemy's territory.

Jihadists have recurrently underscored these observations, and their leaders have repeated over and over again that it was not the immediate targets of the attacks that were relevant, but the issues they represented. 'The targets of 11 September were not women and children', Bin Laden said in a November 2001 interview: 'The main targets were the symbol of the United States: their economic and military power.'[46] Moreover, it was not merely the Twin Towers and the Pentagon that were demolished, but rather 'the Hubal of this time and its values', he stated, referring to a pre-Islamic Arab god who was worshipped at the Ka'ba.[47] Hence, al-Qaeda's leaders concluded, the attacks illustrated the weakness of the supposed world power. America was 'plunged into a state of shock and horror', al-Qaeda spokesman Sulayman Abu Ghaith (b. 1965) commented in December 2002, and 'its dignity was crushed into the ground'.[48] Bin Laden called it a 'harsh lesson' and a 'mighty blow' to the 'biggest military power'. America may look powerful, he stated, but it is soft: 'How quickly it fell from the sky, by the grace of God Almighty.'[49] He further embroidered on the metaphor of the collapsing towers in other statements, indicating that 'something even greater and more enormous collapsed with them: the myth of the great America.'[50] It even illustrated the fall of Western civilisation: 'The incidents destroyed its values. They also destroyed those huge moral towers that spoke of freedom, human rights and humanity', Bin Laden claimed.

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[45] Cf. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 128-35.

[46] Interview published in Urdu in the Pakistani newspaper Ausaf on 7 November 2001, which was republished in the Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* on 12 November (English transl.: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 139-44 at 140). The fact that Bin Laden leaves out the political power is evidently due to the failure of the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

[47] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Umari* (Sep. 2002) 2", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[48] Statement by Sulayman Abu Ghaith, quoted in Kepel, *The War for the Muslim Minds*, 127-30 at 129.

[49] Statement broadcast by Al Jazeera on 26 December 2001 (English transl.: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 149).

[50] Audio statement published on various websites on 14 February 2003 (translated exerpts: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 186-206 at 194).

'They vanished into thin air' in the subsequent war on terror.[51] Thus, he said, 'we can conclude that America is a superpower, with enormous military strength and vast economic power, but that all this is built on foundations of straw.'[52]

According to al-Qaeda's leaders, the 9/11 attacks thus revealed the United States' weaknesses. And just as in the case of the USS Cole attack, jihadists persistently emphasised that all this had been accomplished by limited means. In his December 2001 statement, Bin Laden said about 9/11:

> It was not nineteen Arab states that did this deed. It was not Arab armies or ministries who humbled the oppressor who harms us in Palestine and elsewhere. It was nineteen post-secondary students who shook America's throne, struck its economy right in the heart and dealt the biggest military power a mighty blow, by the grace of God Almighty.[53]

The supposed world power was struck by nineteen young men: 'Young believers with dishevelled hair and dusty feet, who had been chased all over the world', as Bin Laden called them elsewhere to highlight the contrast with their opponent. Yet, he continued, God had guided them.[54] Al-Zawahiri's expressed himself in comparable terms, saying:

> [T]here is no comparison between the power of nineteen men and the power of America, and there is no proportion between the strength of nineteen men and the losses that were inflicted on America. But seeking refuge with God, requesting His help and depending on Him, opens doors for you of which you had no knowledge. God guides you, makes things easy for you, provides for you and reveals to you treasures, skills and strength that you never realised existed.[55]

The messages of the 9/11 attacks thus complement the message of the attack on the USS Cole. Even more powerful than the events in October 2000, they demonstrated jihadists' aversion to American society and, moreover, signalled that a group of faithful young men was able to expose the vulnerability of their alleged superior opponent. In 2003 jihadists would repeat this message, this time in Saudi Arabia.

5.3.4 The 2003 Riyadh bombings

Although many jihadists shifted their principal target from the near to the far enemy in the early 1990s, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remained a prime concern.[56] Frequently, jihadists criticised the Saudi royal family for not implementing the sharia

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[51] Interview with Al Jazeera reporter Taysir Alluni on 20 October 2001, which was aired on 31 January 2002, available at www.youtube.com, last accessed April 2014 (English transl. in *FBIS Report: Compilation of Usama bin Ladin Statements, 1994-January 2004* (2004) 234-247 at 237, available at www.fas.org, last accesses July 2013).

[52] Audio statement, 14 February 2003 (English transl.: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 195).

[53] Statement broadcast by Al Jazeera on 26 December 2001 (English transl.: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 149).

[54] Audio statement, 14 February 2003 (English transl.: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 194).

[55] Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 3".

[56] Cf. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 199-202.

as well as for cooperating with the Americans, whose military presence in the country since 1990 was a major distress for the Saudi jihadists. This, in combination with the return of many fighters from Afghanistan, resulted in a violent campaign against both the Saudi government and Western targets in the country. In November 1995, a car bomb hitting an American building in Riyadh killed seven people, and in June 1996 the Khobar Towers, a housing complex for foreign military personal, were bombed, killing nineteen Americans. Although Bin Laden denied involvement, he acclaimed the attacks and their perpetrators.[57]

In 2003, a new campaign of violence started, which was instigated by al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula.[58] In the night of 12 to 13 May, three suburban compounds in Riyadh were attacked, killing at least 34 people and injuring almost 200. A massive crackdown of the opposition by the Saudi regime followed, which resulted in several shootouts between government forces and Saudi jihadists, causing the death of many of their leaders, among whom the leader of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, Yusuf al-'Ayiri.[59] New attacks occurred, however, among which a blast at the Muhaya compound in Riyadh on 8 November 2003, which killed seventeen people. Again, Saudi government forces struck back, this time killing al-'Ayiri's successors, Khalid al-Hajj (1973-2004) and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muqrin (1972-2004).

What were the messages sent by the Riyadh attacks on 12 May and 8 November 2003? The 'East Riyadh bombings', as the Riyadh compound attacks of May 2003 have become known, were planned as a massive display of power during the skirmishes between Saudi government forces and the jihadist opposition. It existed of three near-simultaneous bomb explosions at different compounds in the suburbs of Riyadh, complemented by several gunmen to kill the members of the Saudi National Guard protecting the complexes. Sixteen suicide bombers were involved and hundreds of kilos of explosives used in order to commit the massacres.

The stage for the performance consisted of three compounds that mainly housed Westerners working in the Kingdom: the Vinnell compound, which was used by employees of Vinnell Corporation: an international private military company that trained the Saudi National Guard, the Jadawel compound, which was owned by BMI International: a company operating mainly in hotel investments, and al-Hamra Oasis Village, a luxurious housing compound housing foreign workers. The targets were thus obviously Westerners – mainly Americans – living in Saudi Arabia, which relates the attacks to jihadists' resistance against American military presence in the country. The timing of the attacks supports this observation, since they coincided with a visit of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell (b. 1937) to the country. The East Riyadh bombings therefore pointed at the cooperation between the Saudi regime and the U.S., a grievance for jihadists that had become even more significant in view of the U.S. invasion in neighbouring Iraq in March of the same year.

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[57] Cf. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, 155.

[58] Although this name was being used only since November 2003, it refers to the same group that was responsible for the attacks in May 2003. Again, Bin Laden's direct involvement in the campaign is uncertain. Cf. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 203.

[59] For an overview of the events, see Roel Meijer, 'The "Cycle of Contention" and the limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia', in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance* (London 2005) 271-311 at 279-83.

Meanwhile, the bombings also strongly affected the Saudi government itself. The Saudi authorities had started a campaign against the militant opposition just five days before the bombings, among others by composing a list of nineteen 'most wanted terrorists'.[60] The 12 May attacks thus signalled the incapability of the Saudi regime to curb radicalism and, more importantly, to protect the Americans inside the Kingdom.[61] Immediately after the attacks, the Saudi authorities therefore reassured the U.S. that they would take the appropriate steps to protect the compound and pursue the perpetrators.[62] This, in turn, enabled al-Qaeda's leaders to accuse the Saudi state of 'implementing U.S. orders in the hope that they will win its blessings.'[63]

The 8 November bombing targeted the Muhaya compound, which consisted of approximately 200 houses for foreigners working in the country. The attack, again involving gunmen as well as a bomb truck exploding inside the compound, was evidently meant as another display of power, signalling that the opposition was not deterred by the massive crackdown of the movement in the previous months. Although the messages of the Muhaya compound attack were comparable to the attacks on 12 May, its timing provided a new dimension to the performance. It was executed on 17 Ramadan, which is an important date on the Muslim calendar, as it is believed to be the day that the prophet Muhammad and his companions battled their opponents from Mecca in the Battle of Badr in 624. According to traditional Islamic accounts, Muhammad's army counted 313 men, whereas their opponents' army was three times larger. Yet the Muslims gained victory, also because they were assisted by thousands of angels (Q. 3:123-5).[64] The perpetrators of the Muhaya compound bombings thus linked themselves to Muhammad's army – an association they explicated by giving their bomb car the licence plate number 313.[65] With God's help, it is suggested, the Muslims will gain victory again.

However, the Muhaya attack became a public disaster. All seventeen victims turned out to be Arabs. Most of them were Muslims, and five of them children. Despite attempts to justify the attacks in a lengthy video with the noteworthy title *Badr al-Riyadh* ('The Full Moon of Riyadh', evidently a wordplay on the term 'Badr'), the attacks caused a public outcry. In addition to successful repression by the Saudi government, the attacks therefore contributed to the breakdown of al-Qaeda on the

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[60] For the list see Meijer, 'The "Cycle of Contention"', 301-2.

[61] That the attacks were also aimed at the Saudi regime was explained in a 76-page study about the attacks by al-Ayiri's Center for Islamic Studies and Research, *Ghazwa 11 Ribi' al-Awwal: 'Amaliyya Sharq al-Riyadh wa-Harbina ma'a Amrika wa-'Umala'iha* [The Operation of 11 Rabi al-Awwal: The East Riyadh Operation and Our War with the United States and its Agents], 1 August 2003. The book was originally published at www.cybcity.com on 1 August 2003 and is currently available at www.tawhed.ws, last accessed January 2014 (English transl. at http://gtrp.haverford.edu, last accessed January 2014).

[62] Cf. John Shovelan, 'Colin Powell to travel to Saudi Arabia Despite Bombings', 13 May 2003, at http://www.abc.net.au, last accessed July 2013.

[63] Bin Laden audiotape partly broadcast by Al Jazeera on 4 January 2004 (English transl. Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 212-32 at 225].

[64] For the traditional account, see William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (1961; Oxford 1964) 119-26.

[65] For footage of the bomb car, see al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1* (Feb. 2004) 9", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

Arabian Peninsula, which would continue until its return in Yemen in 2009.[66] Although the attacks' messages about the Saudi Royal family and the U.S. presence in the Kingdom were clear, the Saudi population was not convinced by the 2003 Riyadh bombings.

5.3.5 The 2008 Danish Embassy bombing

On Monday 2 June 2008 around 1:00 p.m. a stolen Toyota stopped in front of the Danish embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan. Seconds later the car exploded, killing eight people and wounding over twenty. Three days later, the attacks were claimed by al-Qaeda in a statement signed by Mustafa Abu al-Yazid. Probably, it had been masterminded by the Kenyan al-Qaeda chief of operations in Pakistan, Fahid Mohammed Ally Msalam (1976-2009).[67]

The target of the attack was evidently symbolic. The fact that the Danish embassy was targeted should be seen in the context of the protests against the Muhammad cartoons that had been published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005. The publication of the cartoons had led to protests around the world in early 2006, some of which had turned violent, among others in Beirut and Damascus where the Danish embassies had been set on fire. Al-Qaeda too, had strongly condemned the drawings and warned Denmark, as well as other European countries, for attacks.[68] The Danish embassy attack seemed a logical outcome of these warnings. This was underlined in an internet statement in which al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that it was 'in revenge against the state of infidelity called "Denmark" that published cartoons hostile to the messenger of God.'[69] In the martyrdom video that was released three months after the attack, the attack was interpreted along the same lines. It revenged the insulting of the Prophet, it states, just as Mohammed Bouyeri (b. 1978) had done with the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh (1957-2004).[70] Therefore, the video concludes, the perpetrator can be compared to Muhammad bin Maslamah (591-666), a companion of the Prophet who had killed the head of a Jewish tribe in Medina because he had insulted Muhammad in his poems.[71] Hence, the embassy bombing communicated that offending the Prophet is not tolerated and that jihadists defend themselves in the 'war against Islam' in the footsteps of the Prophet and his companions.[72]

Yet there is another context to the embassy attack. Al-Qaeda was dealt a heavy blow in the years 2007 and 2008. It had lost several of its high-ranked operatives, including Abu Jihad al-Masri, Abu Khabab al-Masri, Khalid Habib, Abu Layth al-Libi, Abu Sulayman al-Jaziri and Abu Zubayr al-Masri, who were all killed in 2008. These

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[66] On the downfall of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, see Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 217-26.
[67] Cf. The NEFA Foundation, 'Core Al-Qaida in 2008: a Review' (April 2009) 10.
[68] Cf. Kepel, *Beyond Terror*, 130-1.
[69] Cf. Al Jazeera English, '"Al-Qaeda" Claims Embassy Blast', 5 June 2008, available at http://www.aljazeera.com, last accessed July 2013.
[70] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords: the Raid of the* Muezzin (Sep. 2008) 50", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.
[71] Ibidem, 53".
[72] Ibidem, 1".

losses had severely damaged al-Qaeda's organisational capacity, partly as a result of which it had sought further rapprochement with the Taliban.[73] The Danish embassy attack signalled that jihadists were still able to execute high-profile attacks against heavily guarded targets. It demonstrated that al-Qaeda was still a force to reckon with, despite the heavy losses it had suffered. This view was underlined in al-Sahab's martyrdom video, in which a voice-over remarks: 'The operation was completed successfully (…), showing clearly that the *umma continues to be capable* of producing unique heroes who defend the sanctuary of Islam and Muslims.'[74]

Moreover, as we have seen (Ch. 3.1.2), al-Qaeda faced opposition on another front as well during this period: is was increasingly criticised on a theological level. The attack on the Danish embassy in Islamabad can therefore also be considered as part of al-Qaeda's attempts to move the attention away from the theological disputes and draw it to other issues. Both Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri had issued several statements in the months before the attack in which they rather suddenly readdressed the Danish cartoon crisis and, in addition, paid remarkable attention to the 2008 Gaza-crisis, which could both be seen as attempts to shift the attention away from internal jihadist disputes.[75]

Meanwhile, the perpetrators of the attacks did seem to have taken the criticisms of jihadist attacks on civilians into account. They executed the attack at a time when the streets were relatively quiet and the visa section of the embassy was closed, thus trying to avoid the death of local Muslims.[76] Yet they failed again, since the embassy had relocated most of its personnel, as a result of which no Danish employees were among the victims.

5.4 Conclusion

As noticed, the script for performing suicide attacks had been developed in the 1980s and 1990s. Although Hezbollah, the LTTE, the PKK and several Chechen and Palestinian organisations used the script in different ways, the organisers of the attacks at least partially deployed it for strategic reasons. In the mid-1990s, al-Qaeda too, adopted the method. This might have been caused by the tactical benefits of the means to a certain extent. Yet more important was the symbolic value of suicide attacks, as they were regarded as a means of communication that 'say' something to the audience. In this respect, suicide attacks were complementary to the means that

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[73] Cf. The NEFA Foundation, 'Core Al-Qaida in 2008', 2-11.

[74] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 48" (italics mine).

[75] See for example the audio statements by Bin Laden of 19 and 20 March 2008 and al-Zawahiri of 23 March 2008, subtitled versions and English translations of which are available at www.youtube.com and http://thesis.haverford.edu, last accessed July 2013. See also The NEFA Foundation, 'Core Al-Qaida in 2008', 13.

[76] The attack was performed on a business day around 1.00 p.m., which suggests that they intended to cause casualties within the embassy. The visa section of the embassy closed at noon, however, and the attackers also avoided rush hour to minimise Pakistani casualties. Cf. Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, 'Incident Foreshadows Future Attacks in Pakistan', *Stratfor Global Intelligence Security Weekly*, 12 June 2008, available at www.stratfor.com, last accessed July 2013. The martyrdom video about the attack (Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 43") claims that it was executed on a day on which the embassy was closed for public.

al-Qaeda had used before to communicate with its (potential) support. Reaching a far larger audience than via its media releases, the attacks provided the audience insights into the jihadist movement and its cause.

We have elucidated these insights by exploring the staging and timing of the suicide attacks in Aden, New York and Washington, Riyadh and Islamabad, which were all powerful symbolic statements. Their intended messages show remarkable similarities, of which the following four are the most significant. First, the attacks underscored who the enemies were. The targets of the attacks evidently indicated that the West, and foremost among them the U.S., was the primary adversary, and that the regimes in the Muslim world, which were targeted indirectly in the cases discussed above, were of secondary importance. Second, by striking symbolic targets, in some cases on symbolic dates, the suicide attacks also provided some reasons for jihadists' resistance against the West. They not only signalled a resistance against American and, by extension, Western society in general, but also against more concrete issues, such as the presence of American military forces on the Arabian Peninsula. Third, by attacking symbols of the enemies' authority and power, the attacks questioned the enemies' alleged superiority. They demonstrated the vulnerability of both the Western enemies who were targeted directly and the governments that were supposed to protect them. Fourth, the violence presented the jihadist movement as powerful. The discussed cases were designed as massive displays of power and their symbolic staging and timing showed jihadists that the faithful few were able to strike their opponents with limited means, and that, with the help of God, they would eventually achieve victory over the enemies of Islam, just as the prophet Muhammad and his companions had done in the past.

Together, these messages powerfully summarise jihadist ideology as discussed before (Ch. 3.3). The suicide attacks therefore offer the (potential) supporters of the jihadist movement some general ideas about the jihadist movement and its cause. They show them who the opponents are and why, and they symbolically weaken these opponents while empowering their own community.

6 Performing violence

In addition to analysing the orchestration of suicide attacks and the organisers' attempts to make an impact on the audience, we can also study performances by focusing on their meanings for the actors involved (see Ch. 2.2.2), as we will do in this chapter. Central to these meanings is the concept of martyrdom, which 'becomes the vehicle through which individual bombers frame or give meaning to their different motivations for self-sacrifice.'[1] Therefore, the chapter starts with discussing the Islamic roots of the concept and its modern reinterpretations (6.1), after which it addresses how jihadists have embedded their suicide attacks in these traditions (6.2). Then, we will turn to the form of the violence, which, as we have noticed in the introduction (Ch. 1.4.2), is crucial to grasp its meanings for its participants. By studying the ritualised script for carrying out a suicide attack, the chapter scrutinises the 'story' the perpetrators express about themselves with their performances (6.3). Finally, this story is related to the meanings that the suicide bombers have attributed to their attacks in their farewell messages (6.4). By thus approaching the violence as expressive actions in which the participants display for others the meanings of their situation, this chapter provides a new perspective on the phenomenon of jihadist suicide attacks.

6.1 Martyrdom

6.1.1 Early Islamic traditions

To grasp the meanings of martyrdom in the Islamic tradition, it is significant to note that the Arabic term for martyr, *shahid* (pl. *shuhada*), literally means 'witness'.[2] In the Quran the term is even primarily used in the latter sense (e.g. 2:143, 2:282, 22:78, 24:4), although there are also some verses in which it seems to refer to martyrs (e.g. 3:140, 4:69). Yet both meanings of the term are closely related. By their actions, martyrs deliver a testimony of their cause: they draw attention to their belief system and publicly show their preparedness to suffer or even die for it, which adds to its

[1] Hafez, 'Dying to be martyrs', 55.

[2] The Arabic term is probably derived from the Greek *martys* via the Syriac *sahda*, which also means 'witness', but was used by Christians to refer to their martyrs as well since the second century. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge 1995) 19-20; Friederike Pannewick, *Opfer, Tod und Liebe: Visionen des Martyriums in der arabischen Literatur* (Munich 2012) 25-7; E. Kohlberg, 'Shahīd', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden 2010) at www.referenceworks.brillonline.com, last accessed August 2013.

credibility. This makes martyrs powerful advertisers of their belief system and community.[3]

The first martyrs of the Muslim community indeed acted as witnesses by demonstrating their preparedness to suffer or even to die for their new, monotheistic faith. In Mecca, Muhammad and his followers were increasingly opposed by their fellow citizens, and some of them were tortured or killed because of their convictions. Yet in contrast to other world religions such as Judaism and Christianity, martyrdom due to persecution remained limited in the formative period of Islam. Other conceptions of martyrdom would therefore become more important, the most important of which being martyrs who were killed on the battlefield (*shuhada al-ma'raka*).[4] After Muhammad and his followers migrated to Medina, they waged various battles against their Meccan opponents as well as against others, which resulted in several deaths.[5] These numbers would multiply during the conquests that followed in the century after Muhammad's death in 632. These deaths from the first generations of Muslims were to provide the main source for Islamic martyrdom traditions.

After Muhammad's death, Muslim scholars started to collect traditions about the Prophet and his companions, which resulted in several Hadith collections, biographies of the Prophet (*al-sira*) and accounts of his raids (*maghazi*). In this literature, the final moments of those Muslims who had fallen on the battlefield were vividly depicted, and the same is true of their rewards in Paradise. According to the Quran, those who were slain 'in the way of God' (*fi sabil Allah*) would enter Paradise:

> Do not think of those who have been killed in the way of God as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for, rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, and being glad for those who, coming after them, have not joined them yet, knowing that they have nothing to fear and that they shall not grieve. (3:169-70)

Thus, martyrs were believed to be 'living with their Lord' immediately after their death.[6] Here, delightful rewards awaited them, which are often luridly depicted in early Islamic literature, usually including descriptions of green gardens, plenty of fresh fruits, heavenly odours, such as the scent of musk, as well as the women of Paradise, the mysterious black-eyed *houris*.[7] In the late ninth-century, the 'unique qualities' of martyrdom were summarised as follows: the martyr is forgiven with the first drop of blood, he is shown his abode in Paradise, he is spared from the punishment of the grave, he is saved from the great terror of the Resurrection, a crown of honour is placed upon his head, he is married to 72 *houris* and has the right

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[3] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 1-2.
[4] Ibidem, 30.
[5] Especially the battle of Uhud was important in this respect, because it was lost by the Muslims and caused numerous deaths, among whom was Muhammad's uncle Hamza (568-625).
[6] See also Q. 2:154, 4:74, 9:20-2, 9:111 and 47:4-6; *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4.52.64 and 4.52.299.
[7] See, for example, Q. 44:50-54, 52:18-27; *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4.52.53; 4.54.469; 9.83.29. It should be noted that the Arabic *hur 'in*, which is the Quranic expression for the *houris*, is in itself gender-neutral. Cf. Fred Leemhuis, 'Staat er wat er Staat? Over Volledigheid, Duidelijkheid en Eenvormigheid van de Korantekst', Oratie uitgesproken aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen op 7 september 2004, 16-8.

to intercede for seventy of his relatives.[8] Other traditions had a more evocative character, however. One often quoted passage narrates: 'The souls of the martyrs live in the bodies of green birds who have their nests in chandeliers hung from the throne of the Almighty. They eat the fruits of Paradise from wherever they like and then nestle in these chandeliers.'[9]

Compared to these traditions, the Islamic legal literature that came into being in the Middle Ages had a more formal tone.[10] One of the most important issues concerning martyrdom for the legal scholars was the boundaries of the status: Who counts as a martyr? Once the early conquests had passed their peak and the number of 'battlefield martyrs' decreased, the definitions of martyrdom gradually broadened. Other kinds of death were also recognised as martyrdom, including people who were killed in the service of God (e.g. the caliphs 'Umar and 'Uthman), who died through a disease (e.g. the plague) or who perished while engaged in a meritorious act (e.g. pilgrimage and prayer).[11] Yet the category of battlefield martyrs did remain an important topic in Islamic legal literature. Particularly important for our purpose are the debates about the permissibility of longing for or even actively seeking martyrdom, which could be considered at odds with the prohibition of suicide in Islam.

Because martyrdom in the Sunni tradition has often been closely connected to the waging of jihad, it has a more active connotation than martyrdom in Judaism and Christianity.[12] In line with this observation, there exist several traditions about the first Muslims who 'yearned for death' in order to enter Paradise (e.g. Q. 3:142-3). Even Muhammad himself is said to have desired martyrdom, as he once exclaimed: 'By Him in Whose hands my life is! I would love to be killed in the way of God and then made alive, and then killed and then made alive again, and then again killed.'[13] Whereas Muhammad only spoke about his longing for martyrdom, other sources narrate how some of his companions also acted out this wish. During the Battle of Badr, 'Umayr ibn al-Humam al-Ansari expressed his desire to be among the residents of Paradise. After Muhammad had assured him that he would definitely be among them, 'Umayr threw away the dates he was eating and 'fought the enemy until he was killed.'[14]

Stories like these would provide a useful source for jihadists in their attempts to legitimise suicide attacks. Nevertheless, Islamic scholars have always been divided over the permissibility of desiring, let alone seeking, martyrdom. Whereas some scholars allowed it under special conditions, others, foremost among them the Mu'tazila[15], rejected it straight away. In the end, most scholars considered the intention (*niyya*) of the actor decisive in this respect: when an action is carried out

[8] Al-Tirmidhi, *Al-Jami'*, 3834.
[9] *Sunan Abu Dawud*, 14.2514; *Sahih Muslim* 20.4651.
[10] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 40.
[11] Cf. Kohlberg, 'Shahīd'.
[12] Cf. Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 13; Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 23.
[13] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 1.2.35; 4.52.54.
[14] *Sahih Muslim* 20.4680.
[15] The Mu'tazila was a theological school that emphasised the role of reason. It flourished between the eighth and tenth century in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid empire.

for the perpetrator's own benefit it needs to be condemned, but when it is done for the sake of religion it can be considered martyrdom.[16]

Regardless of these debates, it is significant to notice that numerous early Islamic texts emphasise that Muslims should not 'cling heavily to the earth', to use the phrase of Q. 9:38. In this respect, Muslims are contrasted to other believers such as Jews, Christians and polytheists, who are described as 'greedy for life'.[17] As the famous Muslim commander Khalid ibn al-Walid (592-642) once wrote in a letter to the Persians: 'Accept our religion, pay a tribute or prepare for war. Because the men who are with me like war and death as much as you like the pleasures of life.'[18] In passages like these, the longing for death or, to be more precise, martyrdom, becomes a defining feature of Muslims. It sets them apart from others, creating a boundary between different belief systems. As we will see in the course of this study, the opposition between those who love life and those who love death would become a central theme in jihadist discourse; a theme in which martyrs would figure prominently. Before turning to the jihadists' use of classical Islamic martyrdom traditions, though, we need to take a closer look at the development of the concept of martyrdom in the intermediate period.

6.1.2 Modern reinterpretations

Whereas martyrdom has long remained a subordinate theme in Sunni Islam, Shia Muslims had already developed an extensive martyrology at an early stage.[19] This martyrology has its roots in the succession struggles after the death of the third caliph (*khalifa*, successor of Muhammad), 'Uthman (577-656). After 'Uthman had been killed in Medina, 'Ali (c. 600-661), the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was selected as the fourth caliph. Yet this decision met with strong resistance, among others by Mu'awiya (602-680), the governor of Damascus. Mu'awiya started to fight 'Ali and gradually gained power at the cost of the latter, eventually establishing the dynasty of the Umayyads by appointing his son Yazid (647-683) as his successor. After Mu'awiya's death in 680, however, resistance against the Damascene rulers revitalised. One of Ali's sons, Husayn (626-680), gathered a small group of followers and marched towards Kufa in order to support the resistance against Yazid. Yet Husayn and his followers were intercepted by Yazid's army and massacred in the battle that followed. Husayn was beheaded, and his head sent as a trophy to Damascus.

The martyrdom of Muhammad's grandson Husayn on the tenth day (*'ashura*) of the month Muharram became a central symbol of the 'party of 'Ali' (*Shi'at 'Ali*, hence, Shia), who still remember and re-enact his death each Ashura. The narrative about Husayn's martyrdom has been repeatedly reinterpreted, however. In particular in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, Iranian ideologues such as Khomeini, 'Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977) and Morteza Motahhari (1919-1979) provided the tradition

[16] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 41-2.
[17] See Q. 2:96, in which Jews are described as people 'greedy for life': 'Each one of them wishes that he could be granted life a thousand years, but it would not remove him further off from the chastisement.'
[18] Quoted in Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism*, 41.
[19] Cf. Pannewick, *Opfer, Tod und Liebe*, 89-107.

with new meanings, which reflected the Iranian political context at that time.[20] They compared Husayn's battle against the 'oppressive' rule of Yazid with their opposition against the 'unjust' regime of the Shah.[21] Just as Husayn had done in the year 680, they argued, Muslims should rise against the Shah, even if it would result in their death. Moreover, they insisted that Husayn had known in advance that he would lose the battle and be killed, yet continued with his plan. Likewise, Iranians should actively opt for martyrdom in their battle against injustice. 'Every month of the year is Muharram, every day of the month Ashura and every piece of land Karbala', Shari'ati exclaimed during a speech on *'ashura* in 1972.[22]

By reinterpreting the Karbala narrative in the 1960s and 1970s, the Iranian revolutionaries transformed the Shia conception of martyrdom from a passive tradition of collective remembrance into an objective that should be actively pursued by individual believers. Moreover, they separated martyrdom from the waging of jihad, making the former superior to the latter.[23] Martyrdom was the 'pulsating heart of history', Shari'ati explained.[24] This thought would be translated into practice since the late 1970s, first during the Iranian revolution, and later in the war against Saddam Hussein, in which numerous young Iranians were mobilised to defend the revolution against the new evil. Under the umbrella of the Bassij, they were sent to the front knowing that many of them would be killed. Husayn provided the model that motivated them and ensured them of the righteousness of their cause.[25]

The Lebanese organisations that pioneered the use of 'martyrdom operations' in the early 1980s appropriated the Karbala model to frame their suicide bombers as martyrs.[26] Sunnis, however, lacked such a consistent martyrdom tradition. Moreover, although Sunnis designated some members of their community as martyrs in the course of history, they have never fostered the notion of self-sacrifice that characterises the Karbala narrative. Hence, whereas 'Azzam extensively celebrated martyrs in the 1980s and even considered martyrdom as the essence of religion (Ch. 1.1), he never promoted martyrdom through self-destruction.[27] Rather, it was in Palestine that this conception of martyrdom was introduced in Sunni Islam in the decade after 'Azzam's death.

Since its establishment after the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, Hamas cultivated the martyr as a symbol of its resistance against Israel.[28] For this purpose,

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[20] Cf. Kamran Aghaie, 'The Karbala Narrative: Shī'ī Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s', *Journal for Islamic Studies* 12 (2001) 151-176.
[21] Eickelman, *The Middle East*, 258-9; Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 20-1.
[22] Quoted in Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London/New York 1998) 315.
[23] Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*, transl. Don Renau (1990; Berkeley 1998) 137-8; Aghaie, 'The Karbala Narrative', 168-9; Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 41-3.
[24] Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 315.
[25] Cf. Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 70-83; Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 33-51
[26] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 141.
[27] Kepel, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom*, 85.
[28] See, for example, its 1988 Charter and the leaflets that were distributed by the organisation during the first Intifada: Muhammad Maqdsi, 'Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Palestine' (transl.), *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22 (1993) 122-134; Shaul Mishal and

it appropriated heroic fighters from the Palestinian past, such as 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam (1882-1935), who had been killed in a revolt against the British. In addition, it copied the reasoning of Egyptian thinkers on martyrdom, and especially that of Sayyid Qutb, who had devoted the last part of his *Milestones along the Road* to the tradition of the Companions of the Trench (*ashab al-ukhdud*, cf. Q. 85:1-9), who had been martyred and, according to Qutb, had achieved victory through their self-sacrifice.[29] Although martyrdom already became an important theme in Hamas' discourse during the First Intifada, it would only be in its aftermath that the organisation embraced the idea of martyrdom through self-destruction. At this point, it was strongly influenced by its Shia predecessors with their individualised and active concept of martyrdom. As Hamas could not rely on authoritative traditions such as those about the first Shia imams, its leaders put relatively little effort in theologically justifying their suicide attacks against Israel. Rather, they emphasised the strategic value of the 'martyrdom operations', meanwhile embedding them in the Sunni jihad doctrine as developed by Mawdudi, Qutb and others.[30] Furthermore, in the footsteps of the Iranians and Lebanese, Hamas attempted to foster a culture of martyrdom by publicising its attacks in Palestinian society through photo's, posters, videos and websites. Especially during the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005), Hamas largely succeeded in marketing their suicide bombers as martyrs for the Palestinian cause.[31]

Immediately after Hamas' first suicide attacks, Sunni scholars throughout the Muslim world started to discuss the permissibility of the means. The PLO, which opposed suicide attacks throughout the 1990s, initiated several fatwas by allied *ulama*, which stated that the attacks should be considered suicide, and were therefore unlawful.[32] But also several Saudi *ulama* declared suicide attacks against the law, among whom was the grand mufti of the Kingdom, Sheikh 'Abd al-Aziz bin Baz (1910-1999). In turn, other influential scholars supported the attacks. For example, the then grand mufti of al-Azhar, Sheikh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (1928-2010), saw the Palestinian attacks as legitimate means of resistance and their perpetrators as martyrs. The same was true of Yusuf al-Qaradawi (see Ch. 4.1), who called the operations 'legitimate terrorism'.[33] Although both Tantawi and al-Qaradawi explicitly limited their fatwas to the Palestinian context, they have been

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Reuven Aharoni, *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground* (New York 1994).

[29] See Qutb, *Ma'alim fi l-tariq*, n.p.; Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 138-9. For the interpretations of the tradition see David Cook, '*The Ashāb al-Ukhdūd*: History and Hadīth in a Martyrological Sequence', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008) 125-48.

[30] For examples of Hamas' strategic framing of its suicide attacks, see Mishal, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 71-3; Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God*, 74-75.

[31] Cf. Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 79-114 Anne Marie Oliver and Paul Steinberg, *The Road to the Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* (Oxford 2005); Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 162-3.

[32] Cf. Mishal, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 76-7.

[33] For Tantawi and Qaradawi's rulings on suicide attacks, see The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), 'Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombings Part 1: The Debate over Religious Legitimacy', 3 May 2001, available at www.memri.org, last accessed August 2013.

influential as some of the first Sunni legal scholars justifying suicide attacks.[34] In their footsteps, the Palestinian suicide attacks gradually acquired legitimacy, not only among Islamic scholars, but also among the Palestinians themselves.[35]

The use of suicide attacks by Palestinians opened the door for other Sunni groups and organisations to embrace 'martyrdom operations', among which were jihadists.[36] Just as their predecessors, jihadists, pioneered by al-Qaeda, would appropriate and reinterpret authoritative martyrdom traditions from the past to propagate an active and individualised notion of martyrdom.

6.2 Suicide attacks as martyrdom operations

6.2.1 Theological justifications

Like Hamas, al-Qaeda labelled its suicide attacks as *'amaliyyat istishhadiyya*, which is usually translated as 'martyrdom operations'. It is important to realise, however, that the term *istishhadi*, which is used to refer to the perpetrators of the attacks, has a more active connotation than the classical term *shahid* (martyr). Whereas the term *shahid* bears the connotation of a victim, the term *istishhadi* implies a degree of intentionality on behalf of the martyr and can therefore also be translated as 'self-martyr' or 'martyrdom seeker'. Hence, these relatively novel terms, which were popularised in Palestine, subtly relate the new kind of violence in the Sunni world to the existing martyrdom traditions.[37]

Nevertheless, al-Qaeda's suicide attacks raised fierce debates among Islamic scholars. These debates concentrated on two questions: should these 'martyrdom operations' be viewed as suicide, and is it allowed to attack non-combatants?[38] Concerning the first question, several scholars, including Salafis as well as some jihadists, have argued that suicide attacks equal suicide, and are therefore against the law.[39] Yet other Islamic scholars have argued that the intention of the bomber is crucial in this respect. This stance was propagated by the above-mentioned Tantawi and al-Qaradawi, but also by jihadists such as Abu Qatada al-Filistini and Abu

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[34] Cf. Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 122-5; Kepel, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom*, 89-98.

[35] During the first two years of the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2002), about seventy per cent of all Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip supported the controversial means. This can be deduced from the polls conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research, which are available at www.jmcc.org and www.pcpsr.org, last accessed June 1013.

[36] Cf. Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, 104.

[37] On these terms in their Palestinian context, see Neil L. Whitehead and Nasser Abufarha, 'Suicide, Violence, and Cultural Conceptions of Martyrdom in Palestine', *Social Research* 75 (2008) 395-416 at 397-9.

[38] Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', 93.

[39] Among these scholars were prominent Salafis such as Sheikh Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914-1999), Sheikh 'Abd al-Aziz bin Baz and Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-'Uthaymin (1925-2001), and even some jihadists such as Sheikh Abu Basir al-Tartusi (b. 1959). Cf. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 129; Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism*, 51-3.

Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[40] A considerable larger group of scholars have resisted jihadist suicide attacks because of the second question: they considered it unlawful to purposefully target non-combatants.[41] Tantawi and al-Qaradawi, for example, did not reject suicide attacks as such, yet condemned 9/11 for exactly this reason. In addition, influential jihadists such as al-Maqdisi have warned against the indiscriminate and intentional killing of civilians.[42]

Given the widespread nature of these objections, al-Qaeda felt the necessity to address them. If we look at al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, the most common justification of the practice is that suicide attacks are the logical outcome of the obliged jihad against the West and its 'puppets' in the Middle East (see Ch. 3.4.3). Waging jihad against the 'occupiers' of Muslim lands is obligatory, the argument runs, and therefore the enemies should be confronted. Because of the military superiority of the enemy and the impossibility of defeating them by means of regular warfare, other means have to be found. Following al-Zawahiri's reasoning as discussed in the previous chapter (Ch. 5.2), the videos claim that 'martyrdom operations' have proven to be the most successful way of harming and terrorising the enemy, and should therefore be employed.[43]

In addition to this general strategic argument, al-Qaeda has also explicitly responded to the two theological objections mentioned above. In the first place, it has frequently refuted the objection that martyrdom operations equal suicide. Al-Sahab's videos often underline that this objection is an expression of ignorance, since 'the opinions of the *fuqaha* [Muslim jurists] regarding this issue are very clear': when the act is performed in the interest of Islam, it should be considered martyrdom instead of suicide.[44] This statement is usually underlined with examples of Muhammad's companions 'plunging into' (*inghimas*) the enemy's ranks to obtain the status of martyr.[45] For instance, the above-mentioned story about the martyrdom of 'Umayr in the Battle of Uhud (Ch. 6.2.1) is employed 'as proof clarifying and encouraging martyrdom operations.'[46] But also the tradition of the Companions of the Trench, in which a boy ordered himself to be killed, is used to prove that killing

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[40] Cf. Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', 93; Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 130-1; Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism*, 50.

[41] This is based on texts such as Q. 2:190, 5:32; *Sahih Muslim*, 19.4319-20.

[42] Cf. Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', 93; Kepel, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom*, 104-5. Al-Suri too, criticised al-Qaeda's use of the means against civilians, especially in the case of the 9/11 attacks, although his objections were predominantly of a strategic nature. Cf. Kepel, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom*, 110-20 and 160-71; Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*.

[43] Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 42-47"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: The Manhattan Raid: Part 2* (Sep. 2006) 6-7", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014; *The Wills of the Martyrs of the Raids of New York and Washington: Walid al-Shehri* (Sep. 2007) 29-31", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014..

[44] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 47"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 32"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 20-22".

[45] This argument is derived from Ibn Taymiyya's treatise *Qa'ida fi-l-ingimas fi-l-'aduww wa-hal yubah fiha?* [A Principle Regarding Plunging into the Enemy, and is it Permitted?], n.p., n.d., available at www.tawhed.ws, last accessed August 2013. See also Rebecca Molloy, 'Deconstructing Ibn Taymiyya's Views on Suicidal Missions', *CTC Sentinel* 2 (March 2009) 16-9, available at www.ctc.usma.edu, last accessed August 2013.

[46] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 35-36"; *The Results of Seven Years of Crusades* (Sept. 2008) 84-85", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

yourself (which is considered the same as ordering someone else to do it) is not prohibited in every circumstance.[47] Thus, it is concluded, the legal evidence is compelling that 'the executor of a martyrdom operation (*'amaliyya istishhadiyya*) is a martyr (*shahid*)'.[48]

In the second place, al-Qaeda has attempted to justify the killing of civilians. It has argued that the sharia allows the killing of civilians under some specific conditions, two of which are the most frequently mentioned.[49] First, based on Quran verses such as 2:194 and 16:126, the proponents of suicide attacks argue that it is permissible to kill civilians when the enemy has purposefully targeted Muslim non-combatants. According to the jihadist advocates of suicide attacks, this condition is fully met. For example, the American Adam Gadahn states that 'the coalition of terror' has intentionally targeted Muslim civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan: 'You name it, they have probably bombed it', he says. 'So why should we target their military only?'[50] Another situation in which civilians are believed to be legitimate targets is when they have assisted the enemy in words, deeds or thought. In that case, they fall in the category of combatants, jihadists argue, and should therefore be fought. In recent years, this argument has been stretched to the limit by arguing that all Westerners are combatants (and therefore permissible targets), since they live in democracies and are thus responsible for electing the governments that send their armed forces to the Muslim world.[51]

Thus, al-Qaeda has attempted to justify its innovative practices on two specific points by appropriating classical Islamic texts and traditions. Yet it is more remarkable that al-Qaeda's usual strategy was to simply embed the suicide bombers in the jihadist martyrdom tradition that had developed since the 1980s. It has put relatively little efforts in justifying their suicide attacks theologically – an observation that has been made before, but is hardly elucidated in current literature on the theme.[52]

6.2.2 Suicide bombers as martyrs

As we have seen in the introduction (Ch. 1.1), it was foremost 'Abdullah 'Azzam who promoted martyrdom throughout the 1980s. In writings such as *Martyrs: The*

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[47] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 47"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 31-32"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 83-84".

[48] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 47"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 32".

[49] Two other situations are mentioned in which the killing of civilians is considered legitimate: 1) when it is impossible to distinguish combatants from non-combatants, as was the case during Muhammad's night raids, and 2) when civilians are killed as collateral damage, as was the case during the Siege of Ta'if (630), when catapults were used. See, for example, al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Knights of the London Raid*: *the Martyr Shehzad Tanweer* (Jul. 2006) 18-19", available at www.youtube.com, last accessed April 2014. See also Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', 86-92; Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 131-4.

[50] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 14-18"; See also al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 49-50".

[51] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 49-50". See also al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Knights of the London Raid: the Martyr Mohammad Sidique Khan* (Sep. 2005) 20", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014; Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism*, 53.

[52] Cf. Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', 92.

Building Blocks of Nations, *The Signs of God in the Jihad of Afghanistan, Lovers of the Paradise Maidens* and *The Lofty Mountain* martyrdom occupies a central place. 'Azzam provides dozens of biographies of mujahidun who were killed 'in the way of God', including lengthy descriptions of their piety and bravery, their heroic deaths and the miraculous events that happened afterwards. These martyrs, 'Azzam argued, had attained the highest possible objective for humans and laid the foundations for the revival of Islam, as 'glory does not build its lofty edifices except with skulls.'[53]

'Azzam's writings were – and still are – eagerly consumed by jihadists all over the world and have contributed to the dissemination of martyrdom traditions among Sunnis. Moreover, the respectful as well as rejoicing tone of 'Azzam's writings and the mysterious or even miraculous sphere evoked by his texts would characterise jihadist martyrologies in the years to come, as can be witnessed by the Bosnian audio tape *In the Hearts of Green Birds*. But also al-Qaeda's leaders, and especially Bin Laden, struck the same tone in their statements and copied many of the elements from 'Azzam's writings and speeches.[54] However, the difference was that al-Qaeda's martyrologies also started to encompass suicide bombers in the course of the 1990s. The 'martyrdom seekers' were merely embedded in the martyrdom tradition that had developed in the one-and-a-half decade before.

The incorporation of suicide bombers in 'Azzam-like martyrologies can be illustrated by means of al-Sahab's video series *Winds of Paradise*.[55] Like 'Azzam's writings, each volume of this series contains a sequence of biographies of martyrs. Yet the *Winds of Paradise* series also features suicide bombers, who are presented alongside 'ordinary' martyrs. The suicide bombers are not treated very differently, which becomes evident from the four-minute, standardised introduction of the videos, which precedes the stories of the individual martyrs and connects both 'martyrs' and 'martyrdom seekers' to the early Islamic martyrdom traditions. After a brief title sequence, this introduction starts with a fascinating animated scene. A large tent is depicted with a crackling fire inside and some Kalashnikovs standing against the canvas. Subsequently, the animation directs the viewer inside the tent, where it zooms in on a Quran on a lectern, which is illuminated by an oil lamp and surrounded by, again, several Kalashnikovs. The Quran then opens at *sura* al-Tawba (9), after which *aya* 111 is recited, saying that those who are killed in the way of God will enter Paradise.[56] Thus, the video starts with presenting one of the classical martyrdom verses from the Quran in a context that merges symbols referring to the perceived 'authentic' Islam of the Prophet (e.g. tent, fire, oil lamp) with those of jihadism (e.g. Kalashnikov), suggesting that jihadists are following the 'pure' Islam of the first generations and that martyrdom is central to both of them.

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[53] 'Azzam, *Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations*, n.p.

[54] Cf. Moghadam, *The Globalization of Suicide Attacks*, 80-2.

[55] My data sample includes two parts of the series: Al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 1* (Jul. 2007); *Winds of Paradise: Part 2* (Jan. 2008), both available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[56] Q. 9:111: 'God has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties so that they [in exchange] will have Paradise. They fight in the way of God, and kill and are killed. It is a true promise which is binding on Him in the Torah, the Evangel and the Quran. And who is truer to his covenant than God? So rejoice in the bargain that you have made, for that is the supreme triumph.'

This line of thinking is expanded in the remainder of the introduction of the videos, which constantly relates jihadist views on martyrdom to early Islamic sources about the topic. First, brief footage of Bin Laden is presented, in which he narrates the tradition about Muhammad expressing his desire to be martyred (see Ch. 6.1.1). Then, 'Azzam's voice is heard, again emphasising the importance of martyrdom by saying: 'Our words remain dead, waxen dolls, void of life, frozen, until we die in their cause, then they become alive and dwell amongst the living.' This famous phrase is visually supported by a second animation, which shows a barren landscape full of dead trees transforming into a green, Paradise-like setting. Martyrdom should be desired, the message is, because it brings alive the individual and his cause.

In this Paradise-like imagery, the names of the martyrs featured in the videos appear; 'ordinary' martyrs and suicide bombers alongside each other. While the names appear, a *nashid* fades in, saying:

> Does my death not come only once in my life?
> So why not make its ending my martyrdom
> When the soul of the martyr rises and approaches
> And God raises it up to a lofty status
> In bodies of birds circling in Paradise
> And singing above the palaces and warbling
> Seven [rewards] are won by the martyr to honour him
> If you have a heart, then tell me what they are
> The sin is forgiven with the first drop [of blood]
> And I see my high place and abode
> And I am secure from the horror and torment of the grave: How delightful!
> And saved from the Resurrection
> And crowned with the crowns of dignity
> And given intercession for relatives, both near and distant
> And the *houris* await my arrival longingly

Like the Quran recitation and Bin Laden's statement, the *nashid* refers to classical martyrdom traditions such as the green birds in Paradise and the seven rewards of martyrdom. Early Islamic martyrdom traditions are thus appropriated to express and shape the view that those who died in the twenty-first century jihad are martyrs, just as those who died in the battles of the seventh century. The way in which the jihadists died does not seem very relevant in this respect: the suicide bombers are included in the videos without a single remark about their controversial actions.

Thus, even in videos that are aimed at motivating the Muslim youths, al-Qaeda does not feel the need to justify its innovative practices.[57] From the perspective of the organisers and perpetrators of the attacks as well as the producers of the videos, the status of the 'martyrdom seekers' is not very different from that of the 'battlefield martyrs' of the seventh century or the 1980s, or it should be that the former are even more esteemed because they had willingly sacrificed themselves for the sake of Islam. Meanwhile, we should observe that the 'tools' that are drawn from the

[57] This underlines our observation that al-Sahab's martyrdom videos are not primarily aimed at converting people or convincing them of the jihadist cause, but rather at those Muslim youths who are sympathetic to the jihadist cause or already joined the struggle (see Ch. 1.5.2).

religious repertoire – the early Islamic martyrdom traditions – are applied in new ways. Along the lines of the Iranian ideologues, jihadists have propagated an active and individualised notion of martyrdom, which facilitates the view that the perpetrators of the novel practices are martyrs who died in the way of God. These insights are significant for grasping the meanings of the violence for the perpetrators, which we will now further examine by studying the ritualised execution of suicide attacks.

6.3 Ritualised violence

6.3.1 The ritual process

Usually, acts of expressive violence are strongly ritualised. Hence, they are orchestrated in such a way as to distinguish and privilege the actions from other, more everyday activities, often by giving them a certain formal, repetitive and fixed character.[58] Suicide attacks are no exception in this case. Since the rise of the practice in the 1980s, the preparation and execution of suicide attacks have been accompanied by several rituals and ritual-like activities.[59] Hamas' suicide bombers, for instance, spent their last days or hours before the attack – dependent on the moment of recruitment – according to a rather standardised pattern which included praying, reciting, fasting, performing ablutions and recording a last will.[60] These ritualised preparations highlight the actions and distinguish them from other practices; from daily life activities, but also from other forms of protest and violence.

Jihadist suicide attacks were also thoroughly ritualised. In the months, days and hours before an attack, suicide bombers usually performed several rituals and ritual-like activities to prepare them for their task. Although the precise activities vary on each occasion, I will structure my analysis of the 'ritual process' of executing a suicide attack in three stages: First, the bomber separates himself from his old social position, then, knowing that he is going to die soon, he enters into an ambiguous, liminal phase between life and death, and, finally, he is reincorporated in his community as a 'martyr'.[61] By studying these three stages, I will argue that the

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[58] For my use of the term ritualisation, which I prefer above the noun ritual as a specific category of social action, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York 1992) 74 and 88-93.

[59] For the term 'ritual-like activities', see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York 1997) 138-69.

[60] On the practices performed by Palestinian suicide bombers, see Nasra Hassan, 'An Arsenal of Believers: Talking to the "Human Bombs"', *The New Yorker* 77, 19 November 2001, 36-42; Moghadam, 'Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada', 83-6; Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 87-94; Anne Marie Oliver and Paul Steinberg, *The Road to the Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* (Oxford 2005); Pape, *Dying to Win*, 231-234; Pedahzur, *Suicide* T*errorism*, 170-180.

[61] These stages are based on Arnold van Gennep's model of the structure of rites of passage. According to the French ethnographer, rites of passage, which mark a person's transition from one status to another, contain three stages: separation, liminality and reincorporation, signalling the removal from the old social position, a transitional stage and the attainment of a new position, respectively. Applying this structure can be useful for making an analytical distinction between the different stages of the complicated ritual process characterising a bomber's

ritualised execution of the violence expresses as well as produces the view that suicide bombers change from 'ordinary' men into 'martyrs' in Paradise.[62]

6.3.2 Abandoning earthly life

Jihadist suicide bombers first physically separated themselves from their old social positions and cultural roles in their communities. They usually distanced themselves from their relatives and friends, gave up their roles in society and even left their home countries to join the jihad (see Ch. 3.5).[63] Once they joined the jihadist movement, rituals and ritual-like activities often started to dominate their lives. Jihadists are usually very insistent on 'correct' behaviour. They put great emphasis on sharia and *fiqh*, follow specific rules and norms concerning food, dress and etiquette, and attach great importance to rituals of worship (*'ibada*).[64] By closely following the perceived timeless model of behaviour of Muhammad, they express the idea that they are followers of the Islam of the Prophet: the pure religion that is detached from its specific historical surroundings (see Ch. 3.5). Hence, jihadists' perceived correct behaviour functions as a boundary marker, which symbolically distinguishes them, as true believers, from their 'corrupted' environment.

In many cases, this separation was not only symbolic, but also physical, for example in small cells in Western cities, but also in the training camps in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen or elsewhere. The activities performed there further underlined jihadists' distancing from their old surroundings. In al-Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan, for example, the trainees underwent a rigid programme of military training. Several courses were offered at different levels, existing of strict regimes that included physical exercises and training with different kinds of weapons and explosives, but also lessons on subjects such as geography, military strategy and intelligence gathering.[65] In addition to these more practical lessons, the

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transition from man to martyr. Meanwhile, we should realise that the process is not as rigid as Van Gennep suggested; the ritualised execution of suicide attacks is dependent on their specific contexts. Cf. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, transl. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, (1909; London 1960). Victor W. Turner elaborated upon the liminal stage, see *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca 1967) 93-101; Idem, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London 1969).

[62] For an extended version of this argument, see Pieter Nanninga, 'The Liminality of "Living Martyrdom": Suicide Bombers' Preparations for Paradise', in Peter Berger and Justin E.A. Kroesen (eds.), *Ultimate Ambiguities: Investigating Death and Liminality* (New York/Oxford, forthcoming).

[63] The 9/11 bombers are a telling example in this respect. All of them had left their home countries and, except for one, all had lost contact with their families. As we have already seen (Ch. 5.1.2), the same pattern is discernible in other regions, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where most suicide bombers were foreigners who had distanced themselves from their home countries. Cf. McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers*.

[64] Cf Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 265-9.

[65] The training in al-Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan is extensively covered in al-Sahab's videos, including well-known images of jihadists marching, running and crawling as well as exercising with different kinds of weaponry. Videos that incorporate lengthy footage from the camps are *Destruction of the USS Cole*, *Knowledge is for Acting upon* and *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*. The video *Badr al-Riyadh* includes footage showing jihadists training on the Arabian Peninsula. The video *American Hell in Afghanistan and Iraq: Sa'id al-Ghamdi* (Sep. 2003), 6-7", available at

trainees participated in various rituals and ritual-like practices. They prayed together and sung *nashids*, visited meetings to study the Quran and early Islamic jihad and martyrdom traditions, and listen to sermons, poetry and lectures by jihadist leaders.[66] Thus, whereas the courses were primarily designed to teach the young men discipline and perseverance, they also facilitated the view that the men were members of an army: the army of God. This is illustrated by the fact that horse-riding lessons were given in the camps. Whereas the practical use of this skill can be questioned, the training fuelled the perception that the men were knights in the non-historical army of Islam that was once led by the Prophet himself.[67]

There are also other symbolic markers of the future bombers' separation from their original surroundings and their entering into the perceived community of the few faithful. For example, jihadists who had left their birth places to join the jihad often describe themselves as *muhajirun* ('emigrants'), which refers to the Muslims who joined Muhammad on his migration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina in the year 622. Jihadists also abandon their old communities, the title suggests, and will return victoriously in the end, just as the Prophet had done in 630. Furthermore, in the case of al-Qaeda, the entering into the new community was also modelled on the practices of the first generations of Muslims. New members had to take an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to their 'emir', Bin Laden, just as Muslims had done to Muhammad and the first caliphs.[68] A final marker was the adoption of a new name: a *nom de guerre* or *kunya*, which usually referred to one of Muhammad's companions or a heroic fighter from the first generations after him.[69] Thus, in several ways, the future bombers were symbolically separated from their old social positions, meanwhile becoming members of the timeless community of true believers.

So far, the practices mentioned were not specifically related to suicide bombers, but after someone was selected to execute an attack, he was also separated from his peers – often physically, but at least symbolically. Physical separation occurred in the Afghan training camps, where the candidates were moved to special houses in which they received a particular training. In the case of the 9/11 bombers, this training was given by Abu Turab al-Urduni, the son-in-law of al-Zawahiri, which clearly illustrates the trainees' privileged position in the al-Qaeda camps.[70] Symbolic separation

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www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014, features one of the 9/11 bombers, Sa'id al-Ghamdi (1979-2001), during his training in Afghanistan. On the courses offered in the camps and the activities of the jihadists there, see Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, 101-3, 264-5 and 410-3.

[66] Footage of these activities is shown in al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 20-21"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 1-2"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2* (Feb. 2004) 7" and 34-37", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 39-40"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 16"; *The Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman* (Aug. 2007) 29", available at www.bab-ul-islam.net, last accessed April 2014.; *Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, 9-10" and 16-18".

[67] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole; Part 2*, 19".

[68] This, at least, is what Khaled Sheikh Muhammad claimed. See Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, 402-8 and 423-4.

[69] The nineteen 9/11 hijackers all received a *kunya* during their visits to the Afghan training camps, thus symbolising the abandonment of their old positions and their obtaining of a new status. Cf. Fouda, *Masterminds of Terror*, 110-2.

[70] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 1-6". Their special status also becomes evident from the fact that the future bombers gave speeches or recited poems in front of the

occurred by providing the future suicide bombers with a new status: from the moment of their selection, suicide bombers were considered 'living martyrs' (*al-shahid al-hayy*). This term too, has its roots in early Islamic history. As far as I know, it was used for the first time in the case of Talha ibn 'Ubaydallah (ca. 598-656), one of the earliest converts to Islam. Talha had personally shielded Muhammad during the battle of Uhud, which had caused him serious wounds and had left two of his fingers paralysed. For his bravery, the Prophet promised him Paradise and rewarded him with the status of a martyr. From that moment on, he would be called a 'living martyr', an ambiguous position he would occupy for more than thirty years. Likewise, the men selected for a suicide mission are, in their view, ensured of Paradise, while still dwelling on earth.[71] As was said about one of the 9/11 attackers: 'His body was on earth, but his heart was with the green birds beneath the throne of the Most Merciful.'[72]

6.3.3 The living martyr

The ambiguous position of 'living martyrs' is expressed by several rituals and ritual-like practices that are performed in preparation of the suicide mission. The most important of these practices is probably the (writing and) recording of a last will or farewell message. As noted before (Ch. 4.2.2), this practice has accompanied the spread of suicide attacks since the 1980s. Although it has undergone significant transformations, the writing and recording of a farewell message still represents an important moment for the future bombers. Like most other practices that are executed before a suicide attack, the writing of a testament is based upon classical Islamic sources, in which the importance of a testament or bequest (*wasiyya*) is emphasised.[73] The importance of the tradition is further highlighted by the theatrical character of the recording of the farewell video. Often, the future bombers are specially dressed for the occasion, usually wearing tidy clothes, sometimes accompanied by garments referring to their role as fighters (e.g. a camouflage jacket) or to their cultural background (e.g. a headdress such as a *ghutra* or *kuffiyya* in a particular style). Furthermore, they read their statements in front of a decor containing characteristic symbols, such as a Kalashnikov or the jihadist black flag, or, in other cases, in front of a blue or green screen which facilitates the manipulation of

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'ordinary' trainees. For the 9/11 bombers, see Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 8"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 6"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 15-17".

[71] Talha ibn 'Ubaydallah was one of the ten companions of the Prophet who were promised Paradise during their lifetime: the *al-'ashara al-mubashara bi-l-janna* ('the ten promised Paradise'). The fact that Mohammed Atta's *kunya*, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Masri (al-Masri meaning 'the Egyptian'), refers to another member of this select group, 'Abd al-Rahman bin 'Awf (580-652), can hardly be a coincidence.

[72] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 7".

[73] The issue of bequests is mentioned several times in the Quran (cf. 2:180-182 and 240, 4:11-12, 5:106-107, 36:50) and is treated extensively in the Hadith, see, for example, *Sahih al-Bukhari* (vol. 4, book 13), *Sahih Muslim* (book 13) and Malik's *al-Muwatta* (book 37). Muhammad should have said that it is the duty of each Muslim who has something to give as a bequest 'not to have it for two nights without having his will written down', *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 4.51.1; *Sahih Muslim*, 13.3987. Although these traditions particularly deal with legal issues regarding inheritance, they underscore the importance of the (reinvented) tradition of composing a testament.

the background during the production of the video.[74] Moreover, the texts are presented in modern standard Arabic (*fusha*) rather than the colloquial Arabic that the men are used to speak, which further highlights the importance of the event.

In addition, the content of the statements make the recording of a farewell video a special occasion. It is the bombers' final message to the world. They say farewell to their family, friends and fellow jihadists, and thus publicly confirm their decision to abandon earthly life. Furthermore, Paradise is a returning topic in the wills, so the 'living martyrs' also emphasise their future status as martyrs in the Gardens.[75] For example, 9/11 bomber 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Umari (1979-2001) ends his will by saying to his parents: 'Be patient and expectant and know that if God accepts me as a martyr and permits me to intercede, you shall be the ones for whom I will intercede. And if God, in His generosity and grace, favours me and allows me into the Garden, we shall meet there, God willing.'[76] Accordingly, the statements made in videos like these express the ambiguous position of the living martyrs, who have abandoned their old positions, but have not achieved their new status yet.

Except for the recording of a video testament, the information about the activities of jihadist suicide bombers during the last days and hours before the attack is rather scarce. Footage incorporated in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos provide some clues in this respect, as they often show the future suicide bombers while praying, performing ablutions and reading the Quran in the period before the mission.[77] The videos also indicate that the bombers were sometimes actively involved in practical preparations for their attacks, for example by preparing the bomb car. In other cases, a 'photo shoot' was arranged near or inside the bomb car.[78] Finally, the videos show some glimpses of the last moments of the attackers among their peers. Several recordings are included in which the bombers met their fellow jihadists for a last

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[74] For example, several of the 9/11 bombers are shown in front of images of the WTC and the Pentagon during or after their attack. These backgrounds are obviously added after the recording. For the technologies used by al-Sahab to manipulate the recordings and particularly the background of the speakers, see Neal Krawetz, 'A Picture's Worth... Digital Image Analysis and Forensics' (2007), available at www.hackerfactor.com, last accessed June 2011.

[75] Contrary to public perception, the bombers hardly mention Paradise as a significant motivation for their actions. The men frequently refer to the hereafter, but predominantly to comfort their families and friends. See, for example, al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 42"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 48-52"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 44-45".

[76] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 42".

[77] See, for example, al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 14" and 75-78"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 43". We should be aware of the fact that it is in the interest of the producers of the videos to portray the suicide bombers in a certain way. Nevertheless, although some scenes are clearly staged, I am convinced that the footage also reflects practices that were actually performed by the future bombers. This is confirmed by other sources, such as the so-called spiritual manual for the 9/11 attacks that is discussed in the remainder of this paragraph.

[78] Footage of these activities is shown in al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 11-12"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 1-2", 7", 9" and 43"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 16", 24", 77-80"; *Jihad and Martyrdom: Commander Abu al-Hasan* (Jul. 2008) 40-41", available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 43-46".

time, gave a final inciting speech, prayed or sang together with their peers and then said goodbye, after which they left to accomplish their task.[79]

A more complete picture of the last preparations for a suicide attack can be obtained in the case of the 9/11 attacks. A unique insight into the practices performed by the nineteen men in the last hours before their death is provided by a handwritten document that was found after the attacks in the suitcase of their leader, Muhammad Atta (1968-2001), which had not been taken onto the plane.[80] The four-page document contains instructions for the nineteen men for the last night and morning before the attack. Yet, rather than paying attention to practical issues, the instructions focus on the spiritual preparation of the bombers.[81] First, the text instructed the men to 'renew the intention (*niyya*)', which, as we have seen (Ch. 6.1.1 and 6.2.1), is considered crucial to make a religious act valid. Then, the text guided the men through three phases: 1) the last night and morning, 2) the time at the airport and 3) the attack in the plane. It is remarkable that all the activities the men had to perform during these phases were thoroughly ritualised. Constantly, they were instructed to say prayers, make supplications, recite specific verses from the Quran, perform ablutions and remember (*dhikr*) God and his words. Along these lines, all kinds of apparently mundane actions, from entering the taxi to passing the security checks, were ritualised, which constructed the attack into an act of worship for its participants.[82]

For the perpetrators, the ritualised execution of the 9/11 attacks facilitated the perception that they were performing a sacred act that was separated from the world around them. The rituals of purification they had to perform illustrate this point. Particularly during the night before the attack, the men were repeatedly instructed to purify their hearts and souls, a process that was sealed by performing ablution (*wudu*) before leaving the apartment in the morning.[83] Hence, when they re-entered society in the early morning of 11 September, the nineteen men were supposed to be in a state of purity. During the night, they had symbolically removed the last remainders of the world around them, and once they left their apartments,

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[79] Footage of these activities is shown in al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 35-37"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 16-17"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 78-80"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, 28" and 41-43"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 43-46".

[80] Another copy was found in a car which had been used by the hijackers at Dulles Airport, Washington, and fragments of the text were also found on the site of the crash of United Airlines Flight 93 in Pennsylvania. The text was released by the FBI within three weeks after the attack. The edited Arabic text is published in Hans G. Kippenberg and Tilman Seidensticker (eds.), *Terror im Dienste Gottes: Die "Geistliche Anleitung" der Attentäter des 11. September 2001* (Frankfurt/Main 2003) 117-26. An English translation is provided in Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terror: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago/London 2003) 93-8. For a discussion about the background and authenticity of the document, see Hans G. Kippenberg, 'Einleitung', in Idem, *Terror im Dienste Gottes*, 7-16.

[81] For this reason, the document has become known as the 'spiritual manual' of 9/11. See also Tilman Seidensticker, 'Die in der "Geistliche Anleitung" gegebenen Anweisungen und ihre religionsgeschichtlichen Besonderheiten', in Kippenberg, *Terror im Dienste Gottes*, 29-37.

[82] Cf. Hans G. Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship: Religious Wars in the Age of Globalization*, transl. Brian McNeil (Stanford 2011) 179.

[83] Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 174-6.

they could be considered beacons of purity in a polluted society.[84] They had symbolically distanced themselves from earthly life, and meanwhile prepared themselves for their future status as (inherently pure) martyrs.

The ritualisation of the attacks not only made them into acts of worship and purification, it also enabled the attackers to perceive themselves as part of the non-historical community of the faithful that fights for God's cause. The actions the hijackers had to perform were constantly related to the practices of Muhammad and his companions. For instance, the document reads: 'You should clench your teeth, as the early generations (*salaf*) did before they engaged in battle', and: 'Tighten your clothes, since this is the way of the pious early generations (*al-salaf al-salih*). They would tighten their clothes before battle.' Thus, simple actions such as clenching the teeth and dressing properly are related to the authoritative first generations of Muslims. But this was also the case with less mundane actions, such as the possible killing of passengers in case of resistance, about which is said: 'If you slaughter, do not cause discomfort of those you are killing, because this is one of the practices of the Prophet.' Here, the text again compares the 9/11 bombers with Muhammad, meanwhile ritualising the possible killing of passengers by comparing it with the ritual slaughter (*dhabiha*) of an animal.

By thus relating the actions of the nineteen men to the battles that were fought by Muhammad and his companions, the document expresses the idea that they were re-enacting a 'raid in the way of God' (*ghazwa fi sabil Allah*) just as they had been fought by the 'predecessors'.[85] This is particularly clear in the last passage of the text. After telling the men that their last words should be either a prayer or the *shahada*, it ends by saying:

> If you see the enemy as strong, remember the confederates [who had formed a coalition to fight the Prophet]. They were 10,000. Remember how God gave victory to his faithful servants. God said: '*When the faithful saw the confederates, they said: "This is what God and the Prophet promised, they told the truth."*' [Q. 33:22]

This passage refers to the Battle of the Trench in 627, when 3,000 Muslims are believed to have successfully defended Medina against an overwhelming majority of 10,000 enemies. Like these Muslims, the hijackers are presented as a minority who will triumph in the end.

The ambiguous position of 'living martyrs' is thus expressed in several rituals and ritual-like activities, such as the recording of a testament and the performance of ablutions. These practices are not merely expressions of the living martyr's liminal status, they also play a role in the construction thereof. Rituals establish authority and inscribe power on its participants, and therefore facilitate the view that the

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[84] The text explicitly relates the purification rituals to the separation from the world by stating: 'Purify your soul from all unclean things. Completely forget something called this world.' Van Gennep (*The Rites of Passage*, 20) also stated that purification rituals could be seen as a symbol for separation from the world.

[85] Cf. Hans G. Kippenberg, 'Terror als Gottesdienst: Die "Geistliche Anleitung" als Begründung und Koordination der Gewalttaten des 11. September 2001', in Idem, *Terror im Dienste Gottes*, 67-86 at 77-80; Idem, *Violence as Worship*, 179.

bombers are engaged in a 'martyrdom operation': an act of worship, a *ghazwa* for the sake of God, rather than an ordinary act of violence.[86]

6.3.4 Martyrs in Paradise

The status of suicide bombers as martyrs is reconfirmed by the rituals that are performed after their death, or, to be more precise, the rituals that are *not* performed. According to early Islamic traditions, Muslims who die in a natural way should be ritually washed several times and then shrouded in two or three simple pieces of cloth, after which funeral prayers should be offered and the deceased can be buried. In the case of martyrs, however, these rituals are not required.[87] According to several *hadiths*, Muhammad had ordered not to wash the martyrs after one of his battles, but to bury them in their blood-stained clothes as a sign of their purity.[88] These sources also mention that the Prophet did not perform funeral prayers at their graves.[89] This divergent ritual process reflects the beliefs about the fate of the deceased. Whereas people who die an 'ordinary' death are believed to spend their time in the grave until the Day of Resurrection, martyrs are believed to enter Paradise immediately after their death.[90] The lack of rituals thus reflects the perception that martyrs are transferred to Paradise instantly.

Jihadists have appropriated these traditions, not only regarding their battlefield martyrs, but also regarding their suicide bombers, who were both buried in their blood-stained clothes without performing any of the standard death rituals.[91] But not only the death rituals were omitted. In many cases, the bereaved were not able to perform a funeral at all, for obvious reasons particularly in the case of suicide bombers. This was not considered problematic, however. To the contrary, it was perceived as honourable, as becomes clear from the farewell message from one of the 9/11 bombers. 'O Lord', he requested. 'Do not let our bodies be concealed by a grave, nor covered by earth. So that it receives the glad tidings of entering Paradise.'[92] The suicide bomber directly relates the divergent ritual process to the beliefs about the fate of martyrs. The destruction of the body has completed the process of separation from earth, and the omission of death rituals underlines their obtainment of a new status as martyr.

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[86] On the 'power of ritualisation', see Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 197-223.
[87] Cf. Kohlberg, 'Shahīd'; Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 42-3.
[88] Cf. *Sahih al-Bukhari* 2.23.427, 430, 431, 436 and 5.59.405; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, 20.3129; Malik, *al-Muwatta*, 21.16.37.
[89] Whereas this is commonly accepted nowadays, early Islamic traditions actually disagree on this point. Cf. *Sahih al-Bukhari* 2.23.427, 428, 431, 4.56.795, 5.59.374, 405, 411, 8.76.434 and 590; *Sahih Muslim*, 30.9.5688; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, 14.3129.
[90] The period that people spend in the grave is called (*barzakh*: 'barrier', 'separation'). During this period, they are questioned by two angels, after which the believers are left alone, whereas unbelievers are subjected to a so-called 'punishment of the grave' (*'adhab al-qabr*). This period ends with the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyama*), when all people are gathered to be judged on the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-din*; or the Hour, *al-sa'a*). Martyrs are omitted from such a liminal phase after death, since they are believed to enter Paradise immediately after their death.
[91] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 41".
[92] Ibidem, 55".

To sum up, jihadists have appropriated authoritative early Islamic martyrdom traditions to frame their suicide attacks as martyrdom operations in the way of God. The ritualised execution of suicide attacks supports this perspective. Jihadists have further elaborated the script that had been handed down by organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah by inventively drawing from early Islamic jihad and martyrdom traditions, as well as long-established Islamic rituals and ritual-like practices. Together, these tools provide the performance of a suicide attack with a ritual structure that privileges the practice above other forms of social action and expresses the view that the bombers acquire a new status as martyrs. The ritual structure not only expresses, but also produces this view, as becomes evident from the bombers' farewell messages. In the next section, we will explore the more personal farewell messages that are incorporated in al-Sahab's videos, as these hitherto unexplored sources provide unique insights into the meanings that suicide bombers give to their violence.[93] Three themes stand out in this respect: 1) they committed violence for the sake of the *umma*, 2) they sought God rather than worldly gain and 3) they perceived their violence as acts of worship and re-enactments of the battles of Muhammad and his companions.[94]

6.4 Farewell messages

6.4.1 Fighting for the umma

In most videos, suicide bombers do not say much about their personal backgrounds. One of the themes that returns in almost all farewell messages, however, is that, at some point in their lives, the men became touched by the suffering of their fellow Muslims in other parts of the world and thereafter decided to join the jihadist movement. Some bombers recall a specific moment in their life when they became motivated by the deplorable situation of fellow believers. The Egyptian suicide bomber Abu al-Hasan, for example, had left his country of birth to get married in Iraq. Then, on one day in Iraq in 1989, he recounts in his 'farewell interview', he was listening to an audio cassette of 'Abdullah 'Azzam about the atrocities committed by the Russians in Afghanistan and he asked himself: 'How can it be that we are Muslims, but still think about marriage after hearing about what is being done to our sisters and their honour, and the violation of their honour?' Hence, he tells, 'it was then that we decided to go to Afghanistan.'[95]

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[93] Farewell messages comprise, on average, almost one-third of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. For a large part, they consist of general statements about the state of affairs in the Muslim world and the necessity of jihad in this situation. But they also include more personal messages, which is particularly true for the videos that were recorded after 9/11. These were often less scripted and, as a consequence, much more personal. As these messages provide better insights into the meanings that the suicide bombers gave to their actions, they constitute the main source for this section.

[94] These themes show some parallels with the martyrdom biographies that have been composed by al-Qaeda in Iraq (see Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 147-58). This is not very remarkable for two reasons: the ideological affinity between al-Qaeda and its Iraqi 'affiliate', as well as the impact of al-Sahab's videos on the Iraqi media releases.

[95] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 4-7".

In other cases, the bombers are less specific about their encounter with the suffering of their coreligionists. But the theme is always present, as is well illustrated by one of the Saudi 9/11 bombers, who says: 'I embarked [on the path of jihad] when I saw the Christian and Jewish infidels openly making war on God's religion and spilling blood during the morning, noon and night, in Palestine, Chechnya, Indonesia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and elsewhere.'[96] One of the Saudi Muhaya compound bombers comments likewise: 'I suffer a burning sadness.' Addressing the *umma*, he explained: 'Your sad eyes torture me, so I can neither enjoy my life nor think of sleep. The Muslim blood flows on the ground like a river, and yet the world remains numb on witnessing this. I feel a fire burning inside me, whenever I see spilt blood and a destroyed mosque.'[97] Finally, the Saudi perpetrator of the 2008 Danish Embassy bombing says farewell to his mother in a song. The bomber, a *muezzin*, asks for forgiveness for wounding his mother's heart and making her cry. Then he sings: 'If you knew all the facts you would not blame me (...); Mother, here is a little child under the rubble and his grieving mother screaming for help; Mother, I cannot let this humiliation go on.'[98]

Statements like these clearly indicate that the suicide bombers were personally affected by the fate of their fellow believers in other places, which fits well with the deterritorialised and mediatised character of the jihadist movement (see Ch. 3.5 and 4.3). Nevertheless, we should also observe that the men were motivated by more than just feelings of compassion for other Muslims. They were also struck by the state of the *umma*. The *umma*, once a glorious community that, headed by Muhammad and his successors, had conquered an empire stretching from the Indus to the Pyrenees, was now in a deplorable condition. For that reason, the men argue, the 'neglected duty' of jihad should be restored. As the Saudi 9/11 bomber al-'Umari declared:

> With this act of mine, I discharge my duty and bring to life the obligation of jihad in the *umma*. I have conviction in the duty that this path imposes on me, because the book of the almighty God confirms the compulsory nature of jihad in His way to rescue the Muslims from the humiliation that they are suffering and to save the violated lands of Islam.[99]

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[96] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 17-19". This farewell message by 9/11 bomber al-'Umari is exceptionally personal compared to the other testaments that were recorded prior to 9/11. This may be due to the fact that al-'Umari probably wrote his message himself, whereas the testaments of the other 9/11 bombers were presumably (largely) written for them. My claim that al-'Umari wrote his own farewell message is based on four observations: 1) its content (much more personal), 2) the way in which it is presented (much more fluently, by rote and more self-confidently than those by his peers), 3) al-'Umari's background (well-educated and theologically trained) and 4) the fact that he probably also wrote the spiritual manual for the 9/11 attacks.

[97] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 21".

[98] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 44-46".

[99] To prove his statement, al-'Umari refers to Q. 4:71, 74 and 9:41, in which Muslims are urged to 'go forth' and 'strive' with their wealth and lives in the way of God, for which they are promised a 'vast reward' either if they are killed or if they are victorious. Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 13-14".

Although we will return to this topic in the next chapters, it is important to note at this stage that the suicide bombers emphasise carrying out their missions for the sake of the *umma*. They identified with the worldwide Muslim community and felt responsible to take action in order to 'rescue the *umma* from humiliation', thus assigning themselves a role as its defenders. Each attack against the *umma*'s enemies expresses this self-imposed role and confirms jihadists in their view that they are crucial for the well-being of Islam in the world.

This identification with the *umma* and the supposed obligation to revive its glory also implies criticism of those Muslims who do not take action. 'These youths refused to sit with those who sit back', as Bin Laden comments on the 9/11 bombers.[100] Therefore, each suicide attack not only expresses the jihadists' leading role, but also implicitly points at the passivity of Muslims who know about the fate of their coreligionists, but do not act. Hence, each attack (re)creates a boundary between those who defend their religion and those who look the other way: between jihadists and the passive majority of the Muslims.

6.4.2 Longing for martyrdom

A second, closely related theme that becomes apparent from the farewell messages is that the suicide bombers emphasise their preparedness to sacrifice their earthly positions, possessions and personal ties. The men frequently indicate that they gave up their wealth, families and friends in the way of God. On the one hand, statements like these should be understood in the context of the debates about the permissibility of executing suicide attacks. By indicating that they were not lacking chances in life, they demonstrate that they could not be compared to ordinary suicides. Al-'Umari asks:

> When I sacrificed myself cheaply for God's cause, I did not do so in order to escape from a life of hardship, as those whom God has disgraced allege, or because I could not live like others live. No, by God, when I left home in the prime of my youth, I left in the name of God, while enjoying the finest of food and drink, living in a luxurious home, driving a beautiful car, and able to find an attractive job. But I asked myself: 'and then what?'[101]

Al-'Umari, whose level of education indeed suggests a well-off family, claims that he did not escape life by committing suicide. Instead, he says to have left in the name of God, thus indicating that he was acting with the right intention.

On the other hand, remarks like these tell something about the suicide bombers' attitude towards the world. In all testaments they downplay earthly life, as al-'Umari also does in the next few sentences by referring to Q. 11:15-16, in which God warns everyone who 'desires the life of this world and its adornments'. The *dunya* ('world') is considered just a temporary stay; a 'fleeting enjoyment' that is 'not our true dwelling'.[102] 'What kind of life is this?' one of the bombers exclaimed, adding: 'Life is what the almighty God has said: "Lo, the home of the hereafter that is

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[100] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 38".
[101] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 16".
[102] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 29"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 38".

life, if they but knew"' (Q. 29:64).[103] The suicide bombers stress that they are not focused on this life, because earthly possessions and positions are vain in the end. Everyone dies one day, one of them states: 'Today we have it, and tomorrow it will be lost.' His suicide attack should be seen in this context, he explains to his parents in an attempt to comfort them. He died the supreme death, because martyrdom 'is the death a believer yearns for. It is the death of glory. What death can be better than this, when God himself takes my soul?'[104] Some die in a traffic accident and others on their beds, another bomber narrates. Martyrdom is different, because it means life instead of death.[105]

Downplaying earthly life goes hand in hand with a strong desire for martyrdom. In many testaments, the suicide bombers narrate how they desired to carry out a martyrdom operation for a long time already. For instance, the Egyptian bomber Abu al-Hasan emphasises that he had been requesting to perform a 'martyrdom operation' since the 1998 bombings in Nairobi and Dar es-Salam. In his testament, which was recorded ten years later, he says: 'Since that moment, I have always been keen and insistent on carrying out a martyrdom operation, not to escape life, no, by God!' He perceives his longing for martyrdom as an ultimate form of devotion to God rather than worldly existence. Referring to the tradition of Muhammad's longing for martyrdom (see Ch. 6.1.1), he asks: 'If the Prophet of God wished for this status, then what about us? Why should we not be eager about it?'[106]

Along these lines, the suicide bombers relate their downplaying of earthly life and longing for martyrdom to the practice of the predecessors. That the bombers' discourse is full of references like these is vividly illustrated by 9/11 attacker Ahmad al-Haznawi (1980-2001), who calls upon his audience:

> Divorce yourself from this world (*dunya*) and renounce it, because, by God, it is not as valuable as you think. It is merely a fleeting enjoyment. Sitting and enjoying its delights does not distance you from death, nor does going out for jihad bring you any closer to it. So choose for yourself the type of death you wish to die: Do you wish to die on your bed like a camel dies, or do you wish to die as a martyr, strong in your faith, after you have answered the call of war and hastened to God's pleasure?'[107]

In this passage, the Saudi bomber too, opposes attachment to earthly life to death by martyrdom. He does so by implicitly referring to one of the most well-known 'martyrdom seekers' from the first generations of Muslims, the legendary commander Khalid ibn al-Walid. This man, who once warned the Persians that his fighters loved death like the Persians loved life (see Ch. 6.1.1), is said to have fought more than one hundred battles, with the result that 'not even one hand span of his body was free of wounds.' Yet, although he was used to plunge into the enemy's ranks, he eventually died with his famous last words: 'I fought in so many battles seeking martyrdom, and yet here I am, dying on my bed like an old camel dies.' By echoing these words, the 9/11 bomber indicates that he conceived his sacrificing of

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[103] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 40".
[104] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 48-51".
[105] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 37-39".
[106] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 35-37".
[107] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 40-41".

earthly life and seeking of martyrdom as a continuation of the practices of the *salaf*.[108]

In short, the bombers' separation from earthly life, which is expressed and produced by the ritualised preparations for their attacks, also becomes apparent from the bombers' farewell messages. The suicide bombers are not interested in worldly life, but rather long for martyrdom in the way of God. Suicide attacks express this attitude, as they demonstrate the bombers' willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for their God, religion and community. Therefore, each suicide attack communicates that the perpetrators 'do not cling heavily to earth', as the Quran phrases it, but wage an otherworldly battle; a battle that is part of the non-historical struggle against evil that was once fought by Muhammad and his contemporaries, and which is now revived by the jihadist vanguard. As a consequence, each attack also highlights and reinforces the opposition between the supreme sacrifice of jihadists and the attachment to worldly life of others – be it their enemies or their fellow, passive, Muslims. This opposition, which was already present in early Islamic sources, is updated and reinterpreted by jihadists who, with each suicide attack, re-establish the boundary between the 'lovers of life' and the 'lovers of death'.

6.4.3 God's knights

A third significant theme in the suicide bombers' testaments, finally, is their perceived role as 'knights in the way of God'. In their farewell messages, the bombers continuously indicate that they see themselves as the present-day successors of the Prophet and his companions. In the first place, they see the first generations of Muslims as exemplary regarding the sacrificing of earthly existence. In their view, the *salaf* too, sacrificed their wealth, personal ties and, in some cases, their lives for God, Islam and the *umma*. 'Consider the sufferings of the Holy Prophet', one of the bombers recommends. 'In spite of having eleven wives, he left all of them behind whenever he went out to the battlefield. Why? This is an evident proof of the fact that whoever adopts the righteous path will have to face hardships and suffering. But, in reward, God will grant him everlasting success.'[109] Hence, Muhammad's example is perceived as evidence that the sacrifice of jihadists in general and the suicide bombers in particular will be rewarded.

In the second place, the *salaf* are considered exemplary in their longing for martyrdom. In their farewell messages, the 'living martyrs' repeatedly refer to Muhammad's desire for martyrdom, as well as the story about 'Umayr plunging himself into the enemy's ranks (see Ch. 6.1.1).[110] But also other, less obvious traditions are interpreted as supporting the bombers' longing for martyrdom. Abu al-Hasan, for instance, brings up the prophet Musa (Moses), who had left his people and, when he was asked why he had done so, explained to God: 'and I have hastened to you my Lord, that you might be pleased' (Q. 20:84). After quoting this tradition, Abu al-Hasan comments that he wants to follow Musa's example and 'hasten to his

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[108] For a comparable reference to Khalid ibn al-Walid, see al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 53".

[109] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 37" and 51-52".

[110] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Khan*, 22"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 36"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 35-36"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 83-84".

Lord.'[111] By thus reinterpreting the story about Musa, the Egyptian commander aligns himself with the Muslim prophets' struggle for justice and their attempts to put their people on the right track after they had been led astray.

In the third place, the suicide bombers' final messages make clear that they perceive the violence itself as acts of worship in the footsteps of the battles of Muhammad and his companions. Often, the men describe their violence in terms of ritual and worship (*'ibada*) and compare it with the five pillars of Islam, describing it as 'the pinnacle of worship.'[112] One of the suicide bombers says: 'There is a time for every type of worship as was said by the predecessors of the *umma* and its noble scholars. And now the time for jihad has come.'[113] As this remark illustrates, suicide attacks are not just considered acts of worship, they are perceived as re-enactments of the battles of the first generations of Muslims. The battles of the Prophet are frequently mentioned as sources of inspiration and motivation, as we witnessed in the spiritual manual for the 9/11 attacks. One of the suicide bombers remarks: 'It was God who sent down His assistance through angels at [the Battles of] Badr and Uhud, and God is still the same today.'[114] Thus, whereas the ritualised structure of the execution of the attacks expresses the view that the perpetrators are engaged in an act of worship by re-enacting a 'raid in the way of God' (see Ch. 6.3), the perpetrators underscore this perspective in their farewell videos, which indicates that the rituals and ritual-like activities accompanying the violence have a performative dimension as well.

6.5 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, jihadist suicide attacks are an exceptionally symbolic form of violence. The script for the performances is based on tools such as culturally transmitted roles (e.g. *muhajir*, 'living martyr', 'martyr'), symbols (e.g. the Battle of Badr, green birds in Paradise), beliefs (e.g. a martyr's inherent purity and instant transfer to Paradise) and practices (e.g. doing ablution, performing a ritual slaughter, *not* performing post-mortem rituals). These tools from the cultural repertoire have been appropriated and reinterpreted – as we have witnessed in the case of the concept of martyrdom – and, in concert, transform the violence into acts of worship. They provide it with a ritual structure that not only expresses the perception that the suicide bombers changed from ordinary humans into martyrs, but also shapes this perspective, as we have seen by exploring the meanings that the bombers themselves attribute to the violence in their farewell messages. The 'living martyrs', empowered by their ritualised violence, perceive themselves as God's warriors who, like the Prophet, are eager to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Islam and the *umma*. God is fighting on their side, they believe, and he will bring them victory, as he had done centuries ago.

By thus focusing on the expressive aspects of jihadist suicide attacks, they can be seen as meaningful social actions that 'say' something to the audience. They tell a

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[111] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 35-37".
[112] Al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 36"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 38".
[113] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 4".
[114] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 35-36".

story that includes some of the central themes of the jihadist movement, such as jihad and martyrdom, purity, fighting for the *umma*, following the model of the *salaf*, sacrificing earthly existence and longing for God. The 'martyrs' thus deliver a powerful testimony of their cause, adding to its credibility by showing their willingness to die for it. Besides, the story also points at the differences between jihadists and others. It distinguishes the jihadist movement from its main enemies, the West and the regimes in the Muslim world, but also from the scholars (and others) opposing suicide attacks, as well as from the Muslims who are not willing to make sacrifices, but 'cling heavily to the earth'. The suicide bombers thus express boundaries between the jihadist movement on the one hand, and the West, the regimes in the Muslim world, the critical scholars and the passive Muslims on the other. Along these lines, suicide bombers participate in the negotiations about a collective jihadist identity through their actions.

We should note, though, that the story told by the attacks is hardly 'readable' by the uninformed viewer. Without any knowledge of Muslim notions of martyrdom, the raids of the Prophet or the significance of purity, the message of the attacks remains limited to (some of) the general insights that we have discerned in the previous chapter. The story is fully understood only by those people who were struck by (some of) these general insights, and thereafter indulged themselves in the history, views and objectives of jihadism. It is understood by those who have already joined the movement, and it is with them that fusion can be achieved (cf. Ch. 2.2.2). In that case, the suicide attacks forcefully convey what jihadism is about, expressing a message that binds jihadists in opposition to their common enemies and empowers them as the defenders of the *umma* in the footsteps of the Prophet. Therefore, the orchestration and performing of suicide attacks together comprise a powerful message to the (potential) supporters of the jihadist movement.

PART IV: MARTYRDOM VIDEOS

7 The state of the *umma*

Although suicide attacks express a story that can be grasped by its (potential) supporters, we also know that stories are interpreted differently by different readers. In other words, the meanings of the attacks vary for different observers, and are therefore subject to constant contestation, negotiation and adaptation. Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos have given al-Qaeda the possibility to participate in these social struggles by (re)constructing the meanings of their suicide attacks and convince the Muslim youths of the value of 'martyrdom operations'. Hence, whereas the previous chapters have recurrently used al-Sahab's videos as sources to study the orchestration and execution of jihadist suicide attacks, the following chapters examine how al-Sahab has represented the attacks.[1]

The general framework of these chapters is provided by framing theory (see Ch. 2.3), which enables us to study how al-Qaeda and al-Sahab have attempted to attract, bind and mobilise the Muslim youth, and what the role of suicide attacks has been in this respect. For this purpose, the final three chapters will successively focus on the so-called 'core framing tasks' of social movements: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. Before turning to al-Sahab's diagnostic framing, we need to start this chapter by exploring an underlying issue: that of authority. In order to convince the audience of its narrative or, in terms of performance theory, to achieve frame resonance, it is essential that al-Sahab and its releases are considered authoritative by the viewers. For that reason, this chapter first examines how al-Sahab has attempted to sustain and exploit its leading role among jihadist media producers (7.1). Subsequently, it focuses on al-Sahab's diagnostic framing: its analysis of the current situation and its identification of the problems and their sources. This is done by exploring al-Sahab's representation of the state of the *umma* (7.2) and looking at the actors who are deemed responsible for the current situation (7.3 and 7.4). The last point is particularly relevant for our purpose, because, by blaming others for the current situation, al-Sahab (re)constructs boundaries between the jihadist movement and other groups, between 'good' and 'evil'. This 'boundary framing', as it has been called, is crucial for jihadists to shape a collective jihadist identity in dialogue with these others.[2]

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[1] Hence, rather than distinguishing between the different protagonists in the videos (e.g. suicide bombers, jihadist leaders, off-screen narrators, etc.), these chapters predominantly approach the videos as units, presupposing that al-Sahab has made deliberate choices by including some statements while excluding others.

[2] Cf. Scott A. Hunt, Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, 'Identity Fields: Framing Processes and the Social Construction of Movement Identities', in Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston and Joseph R. Gusfield (eds.), *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia 1994) 185-208.

7.1 Establishing authority

7.1.1 Branding al-Sahab

In the first years after its establishment, there was no need for al-Sahab to put great efforts in branding itself as a credible and independent media producer. Al-Sahab was highly regarded by many jihadists as the sole media outlet of al-Qaeda's leadership, especially after the 9/11 attacks. By broadcasting its messages through Al Jazeera, it reached millions of people and, moreover, indirectly profited from Al Jazeera's high reputation throughout the Arab world. This situation changed after al-Sahab's shift to the World Wide Web in late 2004 or early 2005 (see Ch. 4.2.2). Although several messages would still reach Arab and Western mass media, the use of exclusive web forums reduced its audience. Moreover, authentication of the messages became increasingly important, especially after some doubts were raised about the genuineness of some of al-Sahab's recordings.[3] Finally, the number of jihadist media producers and, hence, releases multiplied in the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as a result of which the competition between the different groups and organisations increased. For these reasons, al-Sahab enhanced the branding of the media group and its releases via various measures.[4]

To start with, al-Sahab professionalised the branding of the media group itself, among others by introducing a recognisable logo consisting of the name 'al-Sahab' in golden-coloured Arabic characters. Often in combination with animated banners, consisting of brief 'trailers' of the upcoming or newly released videos, this logo was widely used on the web forums to validate new releases and increase the visibility of the media group. Moreover, since 2005, al-Sahab's logo also occupied a central place in the title sequences of its releases, which more and more resembled the title sequences of mainstream television channels. Besides, again after the example of mainstream media outlets, al-Sahab started to superimpose the logo in one of the bottom corners of the screen. By thus borrowing branding strategies of established media outlets, al-Sahab attempted to uphold or even increase its image as a credible media producer.

The same pattern is discernible with regard to the releases themselves. Over the years, al-Sahab's productions, and in particular its martyrdom videos, have increasingly resembled news reportages and documentaries of mainstream channels such as CNN, the BBC, Al Jazeera and al-'Arabiyya.[5] Footage was derived from all kinds of sources (e.g. mainstream television channels, websites, own recordings, etc.) and edited together by means of text-banners, animations and voice-overs in a

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[3] These doubts were quickly refuted by respected forum members such as Inshallahshaheed (Samir Khan, see Ch. 4.3.2), see, for example, Inshallahshaheed, 'Refuting the Conspiracies Surrounding as-Sahab Media' (n.d.), available at www.jihadica.com, last accessed November 2013. Most discussions concerned the authenticity of the protagonists of the videos, such as the controversies around Bin Laden's appearance in a video statement of 7 September 2007, available at www.youtube.com, last accessed April 2014.

[4] For the concept of branding in relation to religious movements, see Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (London 2008).

[5] See, for example, the lengthy overviews of the state of the *umma* in al-Sahab *Knowledge is for Acting upon*; *The Power of Truth* (Sep. 2007), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*.

progressively professional way. Moreover, several specific kinds of footage were included that are reminiscent of mainstream reportages and documentaries, such as historical recordings, interviews with world leaders and religious authorities, and comments of independent Western and Arab experts about jihadism, Islam and the Muslim world.[6] Eye-witness accounts and real-life footage were also increasingly used to reinforce the trustworthiness of the accounts and, in some cases, al-Sahab even presented itself as a team of genuine investigative journalists bringing 'exclusive' news to the viewers.[7] Thus, besides branding strategies, al-Sahab also appropriated elements of media genres such as news reporting and documentary film from mainstream media outlets in order to provide authority to its accounts.

Nevertheless, the martyrdom videos harshly criticise conventional media. They are 'shackled', one of the videos states, since they exist 'to serve states, governments and superpowers.' In contrast, 'the honest jihadist media expose their lies, while disseminating the facts and showing the whole world the truth about what is going on.'[8] Along these lines, al-Sahab has attempted to present itself as an alternative to mainstream media for the Muslim youths it aimed at. More precisely, it attempted to present itself as an *Islamic* alternative, as appears from its frequent use of religious sources. For instance, al-Sahab's martyrdom videos contain about 250 explicit Quran quotations, which comes down to one quote every four minutes on average.[9] More than fifty of these quotes consist of recitations that are added by the producers of the videos, which indicates that al-Sahab purposefully combined elements from established media outlets with religious sources that are deemed authoritative by its target audience.[10] But other markers also are used to enhance the producer's

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[6] For historical recordings, see footage of David Ben-Gurion announcing the establishment of the state of Israel and, in the subsequent shots, Palestinians fleeing their homes in al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 1-2". For interviews, see the then Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen defending the Jyllands-Posten cartoons and the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia talking about interfaith dialogue in al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 1-4" and 14". For expert statements, see terrorism expert Peter Bergen commenting on the 'success' of the 9/11 attacks and former editor-in-chief of *al-Quds al-Arabi*, Abdel Bari Atwan, talking about al-Qaeda as an organisation for the masses in al-Sahab, *The Power of Truth*, 0"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 8-9".

[7] For eye-witness accounts, see the emotional account of an American veteran soldier about operation Black Hawk Down in Somalia and an equally emotional narration by a Palestinian man about his sufferings by the hands of the Israelis in al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 3-6"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 19". For the reality-television-like recordings, see the recordings of jihadist daily life and of meetings between al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders in al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 35-38"; *The Power of Truth*, 5-11". For al-Sahab's 'exclusive' news, see *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 15-19", in which al-Sahab claims to have obtained a videotape showing the torture of prisoners by the controversial Jonathan Idema (1956-2012), a former U.S. army reserve who has been found guilty for running a private prison in Afghanistan. The footage was presented with a caption reading 'al-Sahab exclusive', as if it were a real scoop.

[8] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 2-3".

[9] Evidently, most quotations deal with the topics of jihad and martyrdom. Some often quoted verses are Q. 3:169-170; 4:74-76; 9:5, 14-15, 111, 120; 61:10-13.

[10] About another thirty quotations are made by the voice-overs of the videos or are depicted in the background, and can therefore also be attributed to the producers of the videos. That al-Sahab purposefully combines elements from conventional media outlets with religious ones is illustrated by the opening sequences of the videos after 2005. Whereas the animated appearance of al-Sahab's logo in these title sequences is strongly reminiscent of the opening of mainstream

credibility for its Muslim audience, such as the *bismillah*[11] in the opening of the video and Islamic iconographic symbols, such as paradisiacal scenes showing fruit, blossoming trees and water streams.[12]

These classical symbols are presented in remarkably modern ways. For example, in line with today's volatile media environment, the statements of the videos' protagonists (i.e. narrators, jihadist leaders, suicide bombers, Quran reciters, etc.) are offered in rather short units that comprise, on average, less than one minute. Lengthier statements are interrupted by short clips or recitations and elucidated by animations, text banners or explanatory texts. Flashy backgrounds or celebrative background songs are used to depict the videos' protagonists as mainstream celebrities, and *nashids* – a popular genre throughout the Muslim world – are added to further increase the audience's admiration.[13] Even posters and DVD-covers can be downloaded on the forums, which illustrates al-Sahab's attempts to market its 'martyrs' as popular stars in order to align with its young audience.

7.1.2 Spokesperson of jihadism

Al-Sahab has thus appropriated several branding strategies and media genres from established media outlets and blended these with religious themes and elements of contemporary popular culture to convey the image of a trustworthy and widely appreciated media producer. Related to this, al-Sahab has always presented itself as an independent media outlet. It is striking that al-Sahab has never reflected on its relationship with al-Qaeda and its leaders. Even in its interviews with al-Zawahiri, al-Sahab presented itself as an independent media group, and its martyrdom videos strike an equally 'objective' tone.[14]

Meanwhile, the ties between al-Sahab and al-Qaeda are obvious once one knows the history and releases of the media producer. Moreover, al-Sahab gives free reign to al-Qaeda's leadership in its martyrdom videos, while critical voices are not addressed. Although the videos feature several jihadists who had – or still have – divergent opinions regarding some issues (e.g. 'Azzam, Mullah 'Omar, al-Zarqawi) these divergent opinions are not included. Major critics such as 'Dr Fadl', Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and Abu Basir al-Tartusi (see Ch. 3.1.2 and 6.2.1) are outright neglected. Hence, while pretending to convey an objective image of the jihadist struggle, al-Sahab presents al-Qaeda's views as *the* jihadist view.

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media channels' programmes, al-Sahab does not use an opening tune, as these channels usually do, but a Quran recitation.

[11] *Bismillah* refers to the first words of the phrase *bi-sm Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim* ('in the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful'), which is the standard opening of each *sura* (except for 9), as well as many rituals, sermons, etc.

[12] Compare the scenes interrupting al-'Umari's farewell message in al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 26-51" and the animated scenes in *Winds of Paradise: Part 1* and *Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, 2-4".

[13] For scenes reflecting the portrayal of celebrities in contemporary popular culture in both the Western and Arab world, see al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 2"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 0".

[14] Al-Sahab, *Al-Sahab's Interview with Ayman al-Zawahiri*; *Hot Issues: Al-Sahab's Second Interview with Ayman al-Zawahiri*; *Ayman al-Zawahiri's Third Interview*.

This observation is significant when realising that al-Sahab's martyrdom videos encompass more than a celebration of jihadist suicide attacks and their executors alone. In contrast with the farewell videos that had been produced before al-Sahab's establishment, the martyrdom videos embed the attacks in an extensive narrative about the *umma*, the jihadist movement and its enemies. By creating the new genre of martyrdom videos, al-Sahab thus enabled itself to convey its views not only on jihadist suicide attacks, but also on the jihadist movement and its ideology, strategy and aims. Hence, the videos facilitated al-Sahab, and therefore al-Qaeda, to represent the different organisations, groups and individuals that together compose the diverse, diffuse and divided jihadist movement according to their own views to a relatively large audience in the years after 9/11. Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos therefore gave al-Qaeda an important voice in the contests and negotiations about the nature and boundaries of the jihadist movement.

To provide some concrete examples, the video *The Results of Seven Years of Crusades* from 2008 presents an extensive overview of the various 'battlefields' in the Muslim world. The overview includes Iraq and the Islamic Maghreb, and therefore the struggles waged by al-Qaeda in Iraq and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, respectively. Despite differences between al-Qaeda and these organisations, for example regarding their general (global or local) orientation and means of action, they are presented as part of 'a single battle, with a single enemy and a single rank.'[15] Al-Sahab appropriates the perceived successes in these regions, for instance by including footage of attacks with which al-Qaeda had probably nothing to do, yet claiming them as part of the results of the 'seven years of crusades' that had passed since al-Qaeda's attacks on 9/11.

The suicide attacks featured in the videos provide even more concrete examples of the appropriation of other jihadists by al-Sahab, and thus by al-Qaeda. In chapter 5, we have discussed the suicide bombings in Riyadh in 2003. Whereas al-Qaeda's direct involvement in these attacks has remained unknown, al-Sahab has devoted two martyrdom videos to the events, which both include audio and video recordings of the events and extensively feature the suicide bombers and their Saudi superiors.[16] By combining these recordings with some statements of Bin Laden, the attacks are presented as al-Qaeda's attacks. The London bombings show a comparable pattern. Although two of the perpetrators, Mohammed Sidique Khan (1974-2005) and Shehzad Tanweer (1982-2005), had both visited Pakistan in the years before the attacks, direct involvement of al-Qaeda has remained questionable.[17] Yet the two farewell messages of the bombers – which are remarkably simple for al-Sahab's standards and therefore probably recorded by

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[15] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* 38-39". For the tensions between local and global orientations in the case of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, 'The Local and the Global Jihad of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib', *Middle East Journal* 63 (2009) 213-26.

[16] Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Heroes: the Martyrs of the Two Holy Places* (Oct. 2003), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1* and *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*.

[17] The *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005. Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 11th May 2006* (London 2006) 26-7, has concluded that the 'extent of Al Qaeda's involvement is unclear'. See also Aidan Kirby, 'The London Bombers as "Self-Starters": A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30 (2007) 415-28.

others – are incorporated into two of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos.[18] Here, they are introduced and commented upon by al-Zawahiri and a voice-over of al-Sahab, and represented as one of al-Qaeda's greatest achievements.

In short, al-Sahab's martyrdom videos attempt to convey the image of a credible media outlet that reports independently about the Muslim world and the jihadist movement. Meanwhile, al-Sahab acts as the spokesperson for al-Qaeda and includes a wide array of jihadist organisations, groups and individuals under the umbrella of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. It thus represents al-Qaeda as the champion of the worldwide jihadist movement. In this manner, al-Sahab and al-Qaeda have attempted to exercise the authority that was attributed to them in the years after 9/11, and to define and authorise the latter's view on the jihadist movement and its suicide attacks. Our task in the remainder of this book is to scrutinise what this view comprises. How have al-Sahab and al-Qaeda attempted to define the jihadist movement and its actions in such a way that suited them best?

7.2 The diagnosis

7.2.1 Humiliation and disgrace

The grand theme of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos is the state of the *umma*. Almost all videos include lengthy scenes in which the condition of the *umma* is depicted; not only in statements of jihadist leaders and suicide bombers, but also in documentary-like scenes that depict the situation of Islam and Muslims in the world.

The image evoked by these scenes is one of an *umma* in distress.[19] The glory of the past has long since vanished. The Muslim community has been outpaced by the Western world in political, economic and military respect. The caliphate had already been abolished after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and now the *umma* is divided in states that are guided by self-interest and secular ideologies. Moreover, according to al-Sahab's grand narrative, the *umma* is engaged in a worldwide conflict: 'a confrontation between the *umma* and its jihadist vanguard on the one side, and the forces of the crusader-Zionist aggression on the other.'[20] Directed by America, 'the nations of disbelief (*kufr*), the crusaders and Jews, have headed towards our lands and the Muslim *umma* from every horizon and every corner', Muhammad Atef, al-Qaeda's then military commander, explained.[21] And the *umma* has been crushed by its opponents, the narrative proceeds. Its lands are occupied, its natural sources exploited, its women dishonoured, its sincere scholars imprisoned and its holy places desecrated. As one of the 9/11 bombers concluded: 'One who looks at the state of our wounded *umma* today, sees murder, expulsion and torture. Sanctity has

[18] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Khan*; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*.

[19] For a good overview of this grand narrative, see Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole*; *The Power of Truth*; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*.

[20] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 0".

[21] Al-Sahab, *The Destruction of the American Destroyer USS Cole: Part 1* (2001), available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014, 24".

been violated, blood has been shed and innocents have been killed. All of this and more befalls our brothers around the globe.'[22]

In most martyrdom videos, the deplorable situation of the *umma* is elaborated in overviews of concrete manifestations of the conflict in different regions of the Muslim world. Four 'fronts' are most prominently featured: Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq. Following Bin Laden's 1996 Declaration of War (Ch. 3.3.4) the videos present the 'Land of the Two Holy Mosques' (in Mecca and Medina), the land where Muhammad once lived and where the Quran was sent down, as occupied by infidel forces since the Gulf War in 1990-1991.[23] Since then, it has been desecrated by thousands of soldiers who had come not to protect the Kingdom, as they pretended, but rather for their own interests, exploiting the country and using it as a base to dominate the neighbouring areas.[24] The 'Land of the Prophet's Night Journey', Palestine, is also perceived as being occupied by infidel forces. According to the martyrdom videos, it had been handed over to the Jews after the Second World War and, since then, it has been characterised by murder and destruction, claims that are underscored by countless horrific film fragments and images of dead and wounded Palestinian children.[25] The same is true of Afghanistan, it is claimed. The occupation of the country had been a long-standing objective for the U.S., al-Sahab contends, and the 9/11 attacks provided a good opportunity to fulfil this purpose and destroy the Islamic Emirate that had been established by the Taliban.[26] Consequently, in Afghanistan too, Muslims have become subject of the enemy's repression and crimes. Yet, according to al-Sahab, the situation in Iraq is probably even worse. After the horrors of the Gulf War, the Iraqi people became victims of Western embargos against the Hussein regime, which caused the death of more than a million children, as both Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri emphasise.[27] The situation further deteriorated after the 2003 U.S. invasion. Civilians were bombed, women raped, families killed and prisoners tortured, as the videos indicate, making Iraq the 'most critical front' of the *umma*.[28] 'My heart cries for all its worries', one of the Saudi suicide bombers sings about 'the land in which once was a caliphate.'[29]

In addition to these four main 'fronts', al-Sahab presents several other regions in which the suffering of the Muslims by the hands of their 'infidel' enemies has come to the fore. In Chechnya, 'Muslim blood has become the cheapest blood', one of the videos claims.[30] In Kashmir, 'brothers' are killed by 'cow worshippers' (Hindus), in Somalia, the American 'invasion' of 1993 plunged the country into 'hard years in which infighting, criminality and displacement reached the greatest extreme

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[22] Al-Sahab *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 13".

[23] For the emphasis on the religious importance of Saudi Arabia, see Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 4-8".

[24] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 3-5"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 25".

[25] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole* , 8-16"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 0-2"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 40-48".

[26] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 28-29"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 17-18".

[27] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 17"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 22".

[28] Al-Sahab, *The Power of Truth*, 13".

[29]He refers to the Abbasid Caliphate, which ruled parts of the Muslim world between 750 and 1258. Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 40".

[30]Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 17".

imaginable' and in the Maghreb the French 'slaughtered the sharia of the Most Compassionate and suspended the laws of the Quran', while sending their torturers 'to violate the honour of free Muslim women.'[31] In sum, as 9/11 bomber Sa'id al-Ghamdi says in his farewell message:

> Who reflects upon the state of the *umma* today, will find it in a situation not to be envied: extreme weakness and humiliation, tribulation, differences and disregard, and there is no power or might except with God. Our tears cannot even dry from distressing pain (...). Spilling of blood, murder of innocents, ravishing of honour and defiling of holy places, yet the whole world watches these butcheries that make apparent the ugliest forms of Zionist-crusader hatred of Islam and its people.[32]

According to al-Sahab, the perceived conflict between the West and the Muslim community thus manifests itself in different parts of the Muslim world, but everywhere the image is the same: the *umma* is ruined by its aggressive opponents.

Consequently, the central term characterising al-Sahab's representation of the *umma* is *dhull* ('humiliation', 'shame', 'lowliness'), which occurs more than one hundred times in the martyrdom videos.[33] Often, it is used in combination with analogous terms such as *da'af*, *wahn* (both 'weakness', 'feebleness') and *zulm* ('oppression', 'injustice', 'tyranny'), as well as with phrases about the honour (*'ird*) and dignity (*karama*) of Muslims that is being violated and the purity (*tahara*) of the lands of Islam that is being defiled. In concert, these terms evoke the image of a nation that is potentially strong, honourable and dignified, but whose power has now vanished. 'Clothes of darkness (*zalam*) have enveloped us', Bin Laden poetically remarked, evoking the Quranic image of people whom had been left in the darkness by God (cf. Q. 2:17-20).[34]

7.2.2 A cosmic battle

When looking at al-Sahab's grand narrative, it is significant to note that the perceived conflict is framed neither in nationalist nor in ethno-linguistic terms. Although the videos provide extensive overviews of the humiliation of Muslims that are (partly) ordered by country, these countries are often not labelled by the names of the current nation states. Instead historical terms derived from the Islamic or even pre-Islamic past are being used.[35] 'Khurasan' is employed for Afghanistan and, in some cases, Iran and the Central Asian republics, 'The Land of the Two Rivers' for Iraq, 'the Levant' for Syria and, to a lesser extent, Jordan and Lebanon, 'the Arabian Peninsula' for the Gulf states and Yemen, and 'the Maghreb' for northern Africa (predominantly Algeria). The narrative of al-Sahab's videos thus presupposes another political geography than the nation state-based one dominating current political discourse. Moreover, neither the Middle East nor the Arab world is central to this political

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[31] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 19"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* 33 and 48".
[32] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 13".
[33] For the centrality of the term in some jihadist writings, see Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism*, 75.
[34] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 1"; Badr *al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 8".
[35] Cf. Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (New York 2008) 5-6.

geography.[36] Whereas some places are deemed particularly relevant because of their connection with the life of the Prophet, al-Sahab refuses a territorialised and ethnicised framing of the conflict, which fits well with the character of the jihadist movement as discussed before (Ch. 3.5).

Instead, the conflict is framed as a global battle. The nationalist frames that have dominated the struggles against the 'near enemy' until the early 1990s are reframed into one global conflict that is primarily waged against the 'far enemy'. The fights in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere are presented as mere 'arenas' in which the global conflict manifests itself.[37] Consequently, rather than different nations, the *umma* is the central protagonist in the conflict. One video compares the *umma* with a human body – the different regions being its body parts. When one of the parts is hurt, it explains, the others are also affected.[38] By thus reframing the conflict into a global struggle, al-Sahab connects the participants in the different 'arenas'.

The conflict is also framed in religious terms. Nations, ethnicities or political ideologies are not the subject of the enemy's attacks, rather, 'it is a war that targets all strongholds of Islam', as one video indicates.[39] Not only the protagonists are framed in religious terms, however, but the same is true for the antagonists. Instead of labelling them as 'the West', 'America' or 'Israel', the videos employ terms with religious connotations. Israelis are usually called 'Jews' (*al-yahud*) and the Western opponents are often labelled 'Christians' by means of the Quranic term *nasara*.[40] Yet by far the most used label for the *umma*'s Western opponents is 'crusaders' (*al-salibiyyun*), which relates the opponents to the Christian Crusaders between the eleventh and thirteenth century.[41] Repeatedly, this comparison is explicated in the videos, for instance by Bin Laden:

> The previous Crusades brought Richard [the Lionheart] from Britain, Barbarus [Frederick Barbarossa] from Germany and Louis [IX] from France. Today, the crusading countries rushed as soon as Bush raised the cross. Immediately the crusader nations scrambled.[42]

Exploiting George W. Bush's comparison of the war on terrorism to a 'crusade' on 12 September 2001, Bin Laden frames the current 'alliance' waging war against the

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[36] The term 'the Middle East' (*al-sharq al-awsat*) is not mentioned once in the videos, while the label 'Arab' is employed almost exclusively in a negative way, i.e. when criticising 'Arab' rulers or states.

[37] The frequent use of animated globes in the video supports this perspective visually, cf. the opening scenes of the videos Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*; *Martyrs of the Two Holy Places*; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*.

[38] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 40".

[39] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 0".

[40] The term 'Jews' (and its derivatives) is used almost two hundred times. In approximately fifty cases, 'Zionists' (*sahayina*), is used, which puts more emphasis on the enemy's perceived imperialist character. The term 'Israeli(s)' is hardly employed. For Westerners, the term 'Romans' (*al-ruman*) is also used in some cases, thus referring to the (Christian) Byzantine Empire at the time of the first Muslims.

[41] The term 'crusaders' is used over two hundred times in the videos, and *nasara* approximately sixty times.

[42] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Khan*, 14".

umma as the successors of the Christian Crusaders who had attempted to liberate the Holy Land. Yet, he comments, this crusade is even more brutal than those in the Middle Ages:

> This is the strongest, harshest and most ruthless crusader attack on the Islamic World since the beginning of Islamic history. There have been countless crusades before, but none has matched this crusade in its intensity. Bush himself named this war "crusade". Therefore, the *umma* is required to unify its efforts in the face of this crusade, as the outlook of the world today is in two camps, as Bush himself pointed out: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists", in other words: "Either you are with Christianity or you are with Islam." The image of Bush today is that he is in the front row, holding the huge cross and marching.[43]

In this passage, Bin Laden sophisticatedly reframes Bush's 'war on terrorism' from a war between 'the civilised world' and 'terrorists' into a war between 'Christians' and 'Muslims'. He counters Bush's war on terror frame by insisting that it is a war along religious lines, just as it was in the Middle Ages.[44]

In al-Sahab's view, the 'new crusade' is not only comparable with the 'old' ones: they are part of the same conflict.[45] As one video formulates this perspective: 'The Zionist-crusader war is another episode of the conflict between truth and falsehood that stretches across time until God inherits the earth and everyone on it.'[46] Hence, the current conflict is framed as yet another manifestation of the timeless conflict between 'good' and 'evil', a conflict that was once waged by the *salaf* and will continue until the Day of Judgement. The current conflict is part of a cosmic struggle between 'truth and falsehood' that transcends earthly battles and human experience and has an absolute, Manicheistic all-or-nothing character.[47] Jihadists are the 'knights of God', this view implies, and their enemies the 'agents of evil'.

This portrayal of the state of the *umma* raises the question as to how this situation is explained. How could it be that the *umma*, once 'the best of nations' (Q. 3:110), was now in such a deplorable state? If God, the Almighty, had wanted, he could have saved his people from the humiliation and disgrace by the hands of the infidels, so why had he not done so? To answer these questions, I will explore al-Sahab's representation of the different parties in the conflict in more detail in the next sections. Particularly important in this respect are four (clusters of) agents: the so-called 'crusaders and Jews', the 'apostate regimes' in the Muslim world, the *ulama* opposing jihadist suicide attacks and the Muslims who remained passive despite the suffering of their fellow believers. Not coincidentally these are the same 'others' as we met in the previous chapter when addressing the boundaries that are expressed and produced by the suicide attacks themselves (see Ch. 6.5).

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[43] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 3-4".
[44] On Bin Laden's and Bush's framing of the conflict, see Lincoln, *Holy Terror*, 19-32.
[45] For the term 'new crusade', see al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 23"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 13"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 0-1".
[46] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 0".
[47] Cf. Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 74-81; Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 148-58.

7.3 The enemies

7.3.1 'Crusaders and Jews'

Composition
Al-Sahab portrays the so-called 'crusaders and Jews' as the *umma*'s primary enemy. Yet this umbrella term encompasses a variety of agents. Who are they exactly and how do they relate to each other?

The martyrdom videos depict the enemies of Islam as a pyramid, at the top of which is the U.S.[48] They are the 'leaders of the alliance' of enemies and the 'head of a global conspiracy' against Islam, some videos state.[49] The U.S. can be imagined as a trunk that has many branches, another video suggests, or as the head of an octopus which has many tentacles all over the world.[50] In this capacity, it is held mainly responsible for the atrocities committed against Muslims all over the world.[51]

The U.S. is assisted by several secondary enemies, such as the European countries 'uniting under Bush's banner'.[52] Foremost among these allies is Great Britain, which, by drawing on its experience as a colonial power, is held responsible for 'teaching America how to kill and oppress Muslims.'[53] Moreover, the U.K. is blamed for toppling the Ottoman caliphate, founding the state of Israel and assisting the Americans in their 'crusades' in Afghanistan and Iraq.[54] Other European countries are likewise claimed to support the 'new crusade'. Denmark, for instance, assisted the attack on Islam by sending its soldiers to Afghanistan, but also by willingly insulting the Prophet by means of the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons.[55] Not only individual countries, but also international institutions such as the United Nations are framed as part of the 'crusader coalition', for example by claiming that the U.N. was created 'for the security of the infidels (*kuffar*) and its allies.'[56]

In addition, non-Western countries are framed as participants of the U.S.-led coalition. For example, when discussing the situation in Somalia, Ethiopia is also described as a 'crusader' state.[57] An even more remarkable case is India, or, in al-Sahab's terminology, the 'cow worshippers'. In relation to the Kashmir dispute, India too, is framed as member of the coalition of enemies, which, for this specific case, is reframed as a 'Hindu-Zionist-crusader triangle of disbelief'.[58] Finally, a special 'member' of the coalition constitutes Israel. Especially in al-Sahab's first martyrdom videos, the 'Jewish crimes' against the Palestinians are commented upon at length.[59]

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[48] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* 7".
[49] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 14"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 6".
[50] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 14-15".
[51] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 40".
[52] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 21".
[53] Ibidem, 14-20".
[54] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Khan*, 10-11"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 1-3".
[55] Al-Sahab, *The Words is the Words of the Swords*, 0-4".
[56] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 2".
[57] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 48".
[58] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 22".
[59] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 8-16"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 0-2"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 40-48".

Israel is portrayed as an important member of the anti-Muslim alliance, as it is an important factor in American politics and has been able to convince the U.S. to execute their plans in the world.[60] 'They whisper', one video says, and America 'assists with finance, weaponry, equipment and soldiers.'[61] Since the mid-2000s, however, the importance of Israel in al-Sahab's videos has decreased. From this moment on, the 'Jews' are framed as mere 'aides' of the U.S., a position comparable to the other secondary enemies.[62] In the meantime, they are still regarded as a significant player in the cosmic battle and framed in religious terms, not only by calling them 'Jews', but also by using the (alleged) Quranic epithet 'descendants of monkeys and swine' (cf. Q. 2:65, 5:60, 7:166).[63] Moreover, they are compared to the Jewish tribes that opposed Muhammad and were eventually defeated – as will be Israel's fate in the future, it is suggested.[64]

In short, al-Sahab's framing is not as static as the idea of a cosmic war might suggest. In different contexts, different opponents are emphasised, though all under the umbrella of the U.S.-led 'crusader coalition'. When addressing the London bombings, the role of the U.K. is emphasised, when discussing the Danish embassy attack in Pakistan the same is done with Denmark, and when describing the Kashmir conflict India is added to the coalition. In this manner, al-Sahab translates the cosmic enemy into concrete situations 'on the ground'.

Characteristics

The same flexibility is apparent in al-Sahab's characterisation of the U.S.-led 'crusader coalition'. On the one hand, the primary enemy is portrayed as a mere earthly opponent with all corresponding weaknesses and inconsistencies.[65] The martyrdom videos regularly emphasise Western hypocrisy when dealing with the Muslim world by underlining that, whereas the Western countries proclaim the values of freedom, democracy and human rights, they meanwhile support corrupt and tyrannical Arab dictators.[66] According to the videos, this shows that 'the governments of the West are fully prepared to break their own laws and violate their own norms.'[67] Besides, another argument runs, although the Western countries accuse jihadists of targeting civilians, 'they are the ones who have not stopped targeting the weak and defenceless women, children and elderly men for decades.'[68] The enemy is like a man slaughtering a sheep, as a famous comparison of 'Azzam goes. When the sheep shudders and breathes its last breath, and a drop of blood falls

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[60] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 43-44"

[61] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 15".

[62] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 68"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 1".

[63] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 14"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 14-15"; *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 17"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 3"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 40".

[64] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole*, 10"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 14-15";

[65] Al-Sahab demonstrates to be well-informed about its opponents. For example, in al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 25-26"; *The Power of Truth*, 19-20", American domestic politics is incisively analysed regarding Bush's controversial election victory in 2000 and the precarious position and eventual resignation of Donald Rumsfeld in 2006.

[66] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 41-42"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 17-18".

[67] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 16".

[68] Ibidem, 22-23".

on the butcher's white garment, the sheep is accused of being ill-mannered and barbarous. Likewise, he continues, they slaughter us, but still say that we are the savages and terrorists.[69]

The West's (alleged) hypocritical and immoral attitude is explained by pointing at its lack of ideology.[70] According to the martyrdom videos, its policies are guided by self-interest and self-enrichment rather than principles. Westerners aim at earthly gains, which reflects their attachment to earthly existence, al-Sahab emphasises: 'The *kuffar* have everything. They lack no resources, so they are afraid of death and want to live in this world forever.'[71] Echoing Quranic condemnations of unbelievers' attachment to earth (e.g. Q. 2:96) and early Islamic traditions such as Khalid ibn al-Walid's threat against the Persians (see Ch. 6.1.1), the videos repeatedly accuse Westerners of 'loving life' and 'fearing death'.[72] As a consequence, they claim, the enemies' troops are lacking morale. They have nothing to fight for, and therefore they are 'cowards' who prefer going back to their countries. For that reason, al-Sahab argues, the enemies' superiority is only an illusion. They may appear superior because of their technologies and equipment, but once it comes down to morale and faith, they are easily defeated.[73]

On the other hand, the U.S.-led coalition is depicted as a cosmic enemy: an earthly manifestation of evil itself. They are labelled in Quranic terms, not only as the 'head of global infidelity (*kufr*)', but also as *zalim* ('oppressor').[74] This term, which is semantically related to the terms *zulm* ('oppression') and *zalam* ('darkness') that we encountered in al-Sahab's description of the state of the *umma* (Ch. 7.2.1), generally refers to despotic and tyrannical rulers who resist God's message and persecute God's people.[75] Hence, al-Sahab emphasises its opponents' unbelief and oppression of Muslims. This is further underscored by relating them to the prototypical oppressive ruler in the Islamic tradition: Pharaoh (*fir'awn*).[76] According to Islamic tradition, the Egyptian Pharaoh had willingly rejected God's message, persecuted Moses, oppressed the children of Israel, massacred innocent children and even claimed to be a god himself (e.g. Q. 28:38). Likewise, al-Sahab claims, the U.S. is oppressing our people and murdering our children. It has even turned into a god itself, a 'supposed god', the 'lord of the White House' who is worshipped besides God. Hence, it concludes, the U.S. is the 'Pharaoh of this century', and there is no difference

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[69] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 35-37"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 15-17".
[70] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 47".
[71] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 16-17".
[72] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 24"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 7"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi: Walid al-Shehri*, 27".
[73] Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 23"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 40"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 35" and 46-48"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 18-20".
[74] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 27".
[75] Nasr Abu Zayd, 'Oppression', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* 3 (Leiden 2013) 583-4.
[76] This is remarkable, since the label 'Pharaoh' has traditionally been applied to the 'apostate' regimes in the Muslim world, and predominantly in Egypt (cf. Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh*). Al-Sahab's use of the term for the 'far enemy' is another illustration of the ways in which Islamist frames have been transformed into jihadist ones.

between this Pharaoh and the Pharaoh of Egypt, 'except additional unbelief and falsehood.'[77]

Al-Sahab thus places the coalition of enemies in the tradition of infidel, oppressive and tyrannical opponents who have been battled throughout the history of Islam. Moreover, by associating the enemies with false gods, and even with Satan himself, al-Sahab adds a cosmic dimension to this tradition. Frequently, the U.S.-led alliance is described as *taghut*, a term that refers to transgressing the limits (set by God) and worshipping others than God, i.e. idolatry.[78] In the latter sense, the term is associated with the pre-Islamic idols that were worshipped at the Ka'ba – an association that al-Sahab makes explicit by calling the U.S. the 'Hubal of this age' (*Hubal al-'asr*), after the chief of these Meccan gods.[79] Yet al-Sahab also connects the enemies to Satan (*al-Shaytan*) himself. Often, the 'crusaders and Jews' are connected with Quran verses in which Satan is mentioned, but the coalition is also explicitly called a 'satanic alliance' and the U.S. the 'head of the serpent'.[80] By demonising the enemy in this way – a recurring theme in cases of religious violence – the U.S.-led coalition is framed as a force of evil in the current episode of the cosmic battle.[81]

Although this representation explains the humiliation of the *umma* by the hands of their enemies to a certain extent, the question remains why God had allowed the 'allies of Satan' to occupy such a position. The answer to this question must be sought in the behaviour of the rulers and scholars in the Muslim world, and in the *umma* itself.

7.3.2 'Apostate rulers'

If the perceived enemies of the *umma* are imagined as a pyramid with the U.S. at the top and their non-Muslim aides at the second level, the regimes in the Muslim world constitute the third level.[82] In al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, the regimes in, among others, Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Yemen and the Gulf states are severely criticised. They do not care about their people, the videos claim, and are only concentrated on wealth and worldly gains. They are 'people of excess' (*tukhma*, lit. 'illness from overeating') and are too focused on their earthly lives to serve their religion.[83]

More importantly, al-Sahab commonly frames the leaders in the Muslim world as 'apostates' (*murtaddun*, sg. *murtadd*). This labelling is justified by adopting the

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[77] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 2"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 34"; *The Power of Truth*, 19"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 5". See also Bin Laden's statement that was broadcast by Al Jazeera on 26 December 2001 (English transl.: Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 145-57).

[78] Cf. F.H. Stewart, 'Taghūt', in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden 2010) at www.referenceworks.brillonline.com, last accessed December 2013.

[79] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 34" and 41"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 21".

[80] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* 3", 6" and 11".

[81] On demonisation, see Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 185-8; Jones, *Blood that Cries out from the Earth*, 43-5.

[82] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* 7".

[83] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 15"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 9"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* 35".

reasoning of Islamic scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, who had claimed that leaders could be declared apostates (*takfir*) because of their actions, even if they regarded themselves as Muslims (see Ch. 3.3). Hence, the videos put great effort in proving the leaders' un-Islamic behaviour, for example by showing footage of a diner where alcohol was served while members of the House of Sa'ud were present.[84] According to al-Sahab, two kinds of actions in particular have caused the regimes' apostasy: their rule by laws other than the sharia and their alignment with unbelievers against believers.

The 'Muslim' regimes are said to have voided Islam by adopting laws other than those of God. Supported by Quran verses such as 4:65, 5:44 and 5:49, as well as by quotes from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, it is argued that the leaders rule by man-made laws. In Saudi Arabia, for example, interest-based transactions are permitted, which, in jihadists' view, demonstrates that the sharia has been put aside.[85] The leaders have based their rulings on Western, positive law instead by taking the constitutions of England and France as their examples, the videos claim.[86] Moreover, they uphold Western ideologies and values and have made 'nation worship' into their religion.[87] The rulers of the Muslim world therefore disobeyed God's command to 'enjoin good and forbid evil' (see Ch. 3.3.2) and should be regarded apostates.

Al-Sahab's videos also argue that the regimes in the Muslim world have severely violated, or even reversed, the rule of *al-wala wa-l-bara* ('loyalty and disavowal', see Ch. 3.3.2). On the one hand, they have betrayed those who were fighting for the good cause. 'Sincere scholars' and jihadists have been imprisoned and tortured, and those defending Islam have been opposed, as was the case with the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan prior to 9/11. On the other hand, the regimes in the Muslim world have allied themselves with the enemies of the *umma*. They have sought rapprochement with Israel by seeking and, in some cases, even making peace, thus 'selling Palestine to the Zionists'.[88] In addition, according to al-Sahab, they have committed themselves to the demands of the Western nations. The family of Sa'ud for instance, are described as 'toys' of America that have done everything to gain its approval. The Qatari have attempted to 'please Uncle Sam', Bahrain can be viewed as an 'American colony', Yemen had become a 'centre of American intelligence' and the Turks have provided a gateway for the crusader forces in return for a handful of dollars. Pakistan's leaders are 'agents of America' who have sold out Kashmir and assisted the U.S. against the Taliban, and the rulers in the Maghreb are the 'slaves of France' who have facilitated the Christianisation of the area. Even Iran is said to have cooperated with the U.S. by battling the Taliban and backing the U.S. 'puppets' in Afghanistan and Iraq.[89] According to al-Sahab, the apostate Muslim rulers not only

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[84] The video emphasises this 'sin' by encircling a bottle of wine that is visible in the background. Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 33".

[85] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 34"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 28"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 35-39".

[86] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 27".

[87] Cf. Al-Sashab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 4-5" and 31".

[88] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 31-32"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 15".

[89] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 32"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 21-22"; *Martyrs of the Two Holy Places*, 25-26"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 73-75"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* 33-34 and 58-61".

committed themselves to their Western allies politically, they even sought rapprochement to their religions by organising interfaith dialogues, such as the Mecca summit in June 2008, 'which brought together the deviant sects and those abandoning God's law to agree on a new religion.'[90] Hence, without exception, the rulers in the Muslim world have apostatised from Islam by disavowing Muslims and becoming loyal to the unbelievers, al-Sahab contends.

Despite all this, the videos maintain, the rulers have pretended to act in the interest of Islam. They 'disguise behind the mask of Islam', one of the videos states, and another portrays them as 'brothers of devils cloaked in the garb of the *ulama*. They are plotting day and night how to misguide the people and remove them from worshipping God to worshipping the kings and tyrants for valueless worldly gain.'[91] They can therefore be compared to the people of Medina who pretended to follow the Prophet as genuine Muslims, but actually concealed their disbelief. Just as these people, al-Sahab states, the leaders in the Muslim world are 'hypocrites' (*munafiqun*). According to the videos, the regimes in the Muslim world follow the path of ibn Salul ('Abdallah ibn Ubayy, d. 631), the leader of the Medinan hypocrites. Hence, they should be considered even more dangerous than the 'crusaders' themselves.[92]

Just as the U.S.-led alliance, al-Sahab relates the 'apostate regimes' to the unbelievers in the time of the Prophet. Moreover, like the primary enemy, they are portrayed as present-day appearances of evil itself. For example, one of the videos claims that they 'have become like the hordes of al-Dajjal against 'Isa (Jesus)', thus relating them to the false messiah who, according to Muslim traditions, will be battled by 'Isa before the Day of Judgement.[93] In a statement expressed by Bin Laden, the eschatological dimension of the conflict is even further explicated:

> We are in a time prophesied by the Prophet. He said in an authentic *hadith*: "There will come upon the people years of treachery, when the liar will be regarded as honest, and the honest man as a liar; the traitor will be regarded as faithful, and the faithful man as a traitor. And 'al-Ruwaybida' will dare talk. It was asked: What's the meaning of 'al-Ruwaybida'? The Prophet said: It is the vapid man who speaks on the affairs of the masses." And this, regrettably, is the situation of the Muslim world with its grand leaders and leaderships. So this is all treachery! They betray the people and lie to them. However, God willing, the relief from God is near and His promised victory is soon.[94]

As this passage illustrates, the leaders in the Muslim world are embedded in al-Sahab's narrative about a cosmic conflict between good and evil. Together with the

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[90] Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 8-16".

[91] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 32"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 27"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 9".

[92] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 27" and 43"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 23".

[93] Al-Sashab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 27-28".

[94] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 13-14". The *hadith* referred to is from *Sunan Ibn Majah*, 36.4036. It should be remarked, though, that, apart from these quotations, eschatological beliefs play only a minor role in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. On the 'apocalyptical jihad', see Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, transl. M.B. DeBevoise (London 2011).

'crusaders and Jews', they are manifestations of evil. Yet, it suggests, they will be defeated in the end, just like al-Dajjal and Satan.[95]

7.3.3 'The scholars of the palace'

A third group of opponents consists of 'the scholars' (*ulama*). Al-Sahab makes a distinction between 'sincere scholars' and the 'scholars of the kings and rulers'.[96] Among the first group are the 'men of knowledge' who, in al-Sahab's view, have proclaimed the truth without fearing criticism. Examples of these scholars are the Egyptian 'Umar 'Adb al-Rahman and the Saudis Salman al-'Awda, Hamud al-'Aqla al-Shu'aybi, Safar al-Hawali and 'Abdullah ibn Jibrin, even though some of them have also criticised al-Qaeda's actions.[97]

The second group consists of the scholars who have opposed jihadism and, in al-Sahab's view, chose the enemy's side. Al-Sahab's framing struggles with these *ulama* are often not based on genuine argumentation, but rather on vilification and discrediting.[98] In the martyrdom videos, they are put aside as 'agents' of the regimes in the Muslim world and vilified as 'scholars of the palace', 'clerics of kings and states', 'slaves of the rulers' and 'dogs of the country'.[99] Just as their masters, al-Sahab explains, they cling to earthly life and are afraid to lose their influential positions. They therefore 'exhaust themselves in inventing excuses' to condone their masters' policies.[100] They even help 'the tyrants' against their own brothers, and all that 'for a fistful of money.'[101] For that reason, al-Sahab claims, the views and arguments of these scholars are valueless and should not be taken seriously.[102] The *ulama* willingly deceive the people and, like their masters, they should therefore be regarded as *munafiqun* ('hypocrites') and, hence, *murtaddun* ('apostates').[103]

Besides this name-calling, the martyrdom videos recurrently emphasise one substantive argument as part of their framing contests with the *ulama*. According to al-Sahab, the scholars should not restrict themselves to seeking knowledge alone. Knowledge is a good thing, the videos acknowledge, but it is not sufficient. As Bin Laden argues in a video with the noteworthy title *Knowledge is for Acting upon*, the predecessors already demonstrated that knowledge should be accompanied by

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[95] In *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 25" this idea is visualised in an animated scene that depicts President Musharraf surrounded by (hell)fire.
[96] Cf. Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism*, 162-71.
[97] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 12-13"; *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 21" and 45"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 24-25".
[98] For a comparable strategy concerning (intra)jihadist opponents, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Framing Jihad: Intramovement Framing Contests and al-Qaeda's Struggle for Sacred Authority', *The International Review of Social History* 49 (2004) 159-77.
[99] Al-Sahab, *Martyrs of the Two Holy Places*, 37"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 24"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 13".
[100] Al-Sahab' *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 16".
[101] Al-Sahab, *Martyrs of the Two Holy Places*, 37-38".
[102] Several times, the videos advise their audience 'not to consult anyone' about the permissibility of using violence against the enemy. Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 63"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 8". See also Bin Laden's remarks on 'official *fatwas*' in an interview published in *Ausaf*, 7 November 2001 (English transl. Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, at 144).
[103] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 8".

action.[104] Rather than being satisfied with their current positions, the *ulama* should therefore make sacrifices for Islam.[105]

These criticisms could be conceived as an attempt by al-Sahab to convince the scholars of al-Sahab's cause. It is more probable, however, that they are an implicit attempt to discredit the scholars for the main audience of the videos: the Muslim youths. They should not let themselves be deceived by the 'titles, lineages, turbans and beards' of these 'hypocrites', the videos indicate, and it is they who should take up arms and sacrifice themselves for their religion.[106]

7.4 'The slumbering *umma*'

The behaviour of the rulers and their scholars is part of al-Sahab's explanation for the current state of the *umma*. Yet even more important in this respect is the Islamic community itself. This is strikingly articulated in a poem that is recited by 9/11 bomber Walid al-Shehri (1978-2001), who says:

> The bane of the Arabs is a ruler worshipped
> And peoples intimidated by shackles
> An *umma* which has a lot but
> Is exhausted by ignorance, gloom and stagnation
> Its courage has been beset by humiliation and disgrace
> And the poem sings of great sins
> (…)
> We have been drowned by obsessions and sins
> And deep-seated illusions and distractions
> A tumultuous scene and a world of humiliation
> And disgrace for all to see
> (…)
> Our thoughts are dominated by fear and so they have violated us
> And obscenity and unbelief overpower us
> How can the battle be fought by the souls of slaves
> Weighed down by oppression and shackles?

In the poem, the humiliation and disgrace of the *umma* is not explained by the strength of the enemy or the failure of the rulers and scholars. Rather, the *umma* itself is blamed. 'Great sins', 'obsessions', 'fear' and 'unbelief' have created a situation that is comparable to the pre-Islamic period of ignorance (*jahiliyya*). The Muslims have neglected God's commands, al-Shehri comments, 'and therefore God has humiliated them as a just punishment.'[107]

By blaming the Muslims themselves for the *umma*'s humiliation, al-Sahab stays close to the Quranic meaning of the term *dhull*, which often expresses divine punishment (e.g. Q. 2:61, 3:112 and 10:26).[108] The Muslims are punished because

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[104] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 50-54".
[105] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 19".
[106] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 72".
[107] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 17-19".
[108] Cf. Wim Raven, 'Reward and Punishment', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* 4 (Leiden 2013) 451-61 at 453.

'faith has disappeared from their hearts', the martyrdom videos claim.[109] One of them states: 'Humiliation has dominated the *umma* as a punishment from God; not because the infidels are stronger in number and materiel than the Muslims, but because the Muslims have inclined to the life of this world and drowned themselves in forbidden things.'[110] In another video, al-Yazid quotes a *hadith* that emphasises the same point: 'He [Muhammad] said: "God will place weakness (*wahn*) in your hearts." It was asked: "What is the weakness, O messenger of God?" He answered: "Love of this life and dislike of death."'[111]

According to these statements, Muslims are too attached to earthly life to faithfully serve their religion. They only care about their possessions, statuses and lives, and 'prefer the *dunya* to God and his Messenger and to the hereafter', a video states, paraphrasing an often quoted Quran passage about people who were hesitant to go to battle because they clung too heavily to the earth (Q. 9:38).[112] Likewise, when Muslims hear about the oppression of their brothers and sisters, they are unwilling to make sacrifices. The *umma* is in a state of *subat* ('slumber', 'lethargy'), al-Sahab repeatedly emphasises, and Muslims have therefore only themselves to blame.[113] As Bin Laden summarises al-Sahab's major argument in this respect: 'The love of worldly life that has captured the hearts of many of us is the main reason for these calamities and for this humiliation and degradation.'[114]

At this point, al-Sahab's diagnosis of the current situation moves seamlessly into its solution. When accepting the videos' analysis of the current situation, it becomes inconceivable to just continue with your life while your 'brothers and sisters' are being humiliated. The Muslims should awake from their slumber, stand up and embrace the jihad and martyrdom to revive the glorious *umma*.[115] For that, according to al-Sahab, is the solution.

7.5 Conclusion

The suicide attacks in Aden, Manhattan, Riyadh, London, Islamabad and elsewhere have drawn attention to the jihadist movement, al-Qaeda and, in their footsteps, al-Sahab. They therefore enabled al-Sahab to portray its view on the current state of the world for a relatively large audience: an opportunity it has fully grasped in its martyrdom videos. It has presented itself as a credible and independent media outlet, but at the same time facilitated al-Qaeda to represent the jihadist movement according to its own views, which gave the latter an important voice in the contests about the nature, ideology, strategies and aims of the jihadist movement.

In the martyrdom videos, the suicide attacks are embedded in a narrative about the state of the *umma* and its enemies, which facilitates al-Sahab, and therefore al-

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[109] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 17-18" and 30".
[110] Al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 38-39".
[111] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 4".
[112] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 9-10".
[113] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 18"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 3"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 19".
[114] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 25".
[115] Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 18"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*: 3"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 19".

Qaeda, to define the current state of affairs in the world in a way that suits them best. Al-Sahab's definition counters other definitions, such as those portraying the current situation as a conflict between terrorists and the civilised world, or those framing the situation in ethno-political terms. Instead, al-Sahab fervently promotes the view that the different battlefields in the Muslim world are part of one and the same global conflict, which is fought along religious lines and has a timeless character – a cosmic conflict between 'good' and 'evil'.

In the current episode of the conflict, Islam and the *umma* are under siege from a coalition of opponents, according to al-Sahab. These opponents are, to a greater or lesser extent, framed as worldly manifestations of evil: as the agents of Satan and al-Dajjal and the successors of evil's representatives throughout history. Their behaviour is framed as distinctly malicious and, often echoing characteristics of Muhammad's opponents, typified as materialistic, corrupt, selfish, immoral, treacherous, tyrannical, oppressive, and, because of their love of this life, fearful of death. Yet they have been able to oppress the *umma* because, in al-Sahab's view, the Muslims have neglected God's commands and are too attached to earthly existence to make sacrifices for their brothers and sisters. As a result, the *umma* is characterised by weakness, humiliation, disgrace, oppression and defilement. The Muslims are in a state of slumber while darkness is closing in on them.

When translating the above into terms of boundary framing, we can make three observations. First, al-Sahab's definition of al-Qaeda is rather inclusive: all other jihadist organisations and groups are encompassed as part of the movement that is headed by Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. Second, al-Sahab draws strong symbolic boundaries between the *umma* and its opponents. The 'crusaders and Jews' are vehemently opposed as the *umma*'s primary enemy, and the 'apostate regimes' and 'scholars of the palace' as its agents. By means of a cluster of related terms, concepts and ideas, these adversaries are associated with infidel opponents from the past and even with evil itself, and thus presented as a cosmic opponent that needs to be fought. Third, al-Sahab's framing of the *umma* is more ambiguous. As the central protagonist of the cosmic conflict, al-Sahab, and therefore al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement, identifies with the *umma*. Yet, it also criticises the Muslim community as weak and passive, and blames it for the current state of affairs. This ambiguous position enables al-Sahab to demarcate the jihadist movement from the Muslim masses and present it as the solution for the *umma*'s problems, as we will see in the final two chapters.

8 The solution

This chapter focuses on al-Sahab's so-called prognostic framing, i.e. the solution it offers for the perceived problems in the Muslim world, the alternatives it proposes and the methods it suggests to bring these alternatives about. In particular, it examines the role of suicide attacks in this respect by studying the meanings that are (explicitly as well as more implicitly) attributed to them in the martyrdom videos. By arguing that these meanings, which closely relate to the meanings given to the violence by the perpetrators themselves (see Ch. 6), are crucial to understand al-Sahab's suggested solution for the current state of the *umma*, this chapter sheds new light on current understandings of al-Qaeda's suicide attacks.

Evidently, jihadists are not the only ones conceiving the current state of Islam in the world as problematic. Other Muslim movements, organisations and individuals have also acknowledged this situation, and accordingly proposed their own alternatives and methods. Before exploring al-Sahab's prognostic framing, it is therefore significant to examine the ways in which it has challenged other frames (8.1).[1] After discussing these framing contests, the chapter proceeds by examining al-Sahab's solution for the current state of the *umma*. As we will see, this proposed solution proceeds in several stages, which are subsequently discussed: first migration, preparation and *ribat* (8.2), then jihad (8.3) and, finally, suicide attacks. The latter stage is discussed in two steps: First we examine how al-Sahab frames suicide attacks as the way towards victory (8.4) and, subsequently, we scrutinise the more implicit meanings given to the violence and the ways in which these meanings relate to al-Sahab's portrayal of the state of the *umma* (8.5).

8.1 *Da'wa* and politics

Religious movements in a perceived state of crisis often proclaim a return to an imagined 'golden age' as the solution.[2] Once the community re-embraces the 'pure faith' of the past, the argument goes, glory will be restored. Jihadism is no exception in this respect. To end the humiliation of the *umma*, Muslims should return to the Islam of the Prophet and his companions, it is argued. 'Adopt the *Sunna* of the Prophet', one of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos advises, and Islam shall revive.[3]

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[1] Cf. Benford, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements', 616-7.

[2] Cf. Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (London 1989); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *The Fundamentalism Project*, 5 vols. (Chicago 1991-1995); Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism* (2000; rev. ed. Cambridge 2008).

[3] Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 28".

Yet we should ask, what exactly does it mean to accept Muhammad's way as the example? The practice of Muhammad might be perceived as a blueprint for the present, but Islam is not a fixed 'thing' that can simply be 'copy-pasted' from the seventh to the twenty-first century. Instead, the 'Islam of the pious predecessors' is a construct that is open to multiple interpretations and subject to contestation and negotiation among Muslims. When we limit ourselves to Salafis, we can already observe fierce debates about the best method (*manhaj*) to transform society after the example of the Prophet (see Ch. 3.3.2). Whereas the so-called 'quietists' consider *da'wa* ('inviting' to Islam, preaching) the appropriate method, 'politicos' mainly focus on political means and 'Jihadi-Salafis' on the jihad. This makes it particularly relevant to explore how al-Sahab has framed the 'pure faith' of the first generations. What does the 'example of the Prophet' mean according to the martyrdom videos?

It will come as no surprise that al-Sahab supports the stance of 'Jihadi-Salafism', which, as we have seen, is one of jihadism's main ideological roots. Moreover, al-Sahab fervently opposes groups and organisations – Salafists as well as others – that advocate other methods than jihad. In the first place, al-Sahab's martyrdom videos repeatedly resist groups and individuals who argue that *da'wa* is preferable above jihad at this stage in history. According to some reformist or 'purist' Salafi scholars, Muslims should initially focus on propagation (*da'wa*), education (*tarbiya*) and purification (*tazkiyya*) in order to transform society.[4] Al-Sahab claims that this was not the method of the Prophet. 'Those affiliated with *da'wa*', as these opponents are called, are too much focused on seeking knowledge, even though this 'was never raised in the time of *al-salaf al-salih*', Bin Laden states in one of al-Sahab's videos. Instead, he explains, the predecessors used the sword to let people know the truth about Islam.[5] The purists, the 'scholars of the palace' and movements such as The Muslim Brotherhood and Tablighi Jama'at have therefore adopted the wrong method.[6] They 'stir up doubts' among the Muslim youths and 'deceive the people by turning them away from jihad', it is stated, and they will be held accountable for this on the Day of Judgement. Hence, the videos advise, they should use their pens in service of jihad or, even better, exchange the pen for the sword.[7]

In the second place, al-Sahab counterframes groups and organisations that have attempted to transform society by participating in politics. It does so by emphasising the unlawfulness of political systems based on man-made laws, but also by pointing at the failure of Islamist projects: 'As for the field of politics, my friends, we are defeated in them', al-Sahab says through the mouth of 'Azzam.[8] Along these lines, political efforts are framed as a debacle. For instance, one of the videos refers to

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[4] Cf. Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', 217-21.

[5] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 50-54".

[6] According to al-Sahab's releases, The Muslim Brotherhood and Tablighi Jama'at also were aiming too much at islamising society from below. Cf. Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 43". For al-Zawahiri's critique on the Muslim Brotherhood, see Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Al-Hisad al-Murr li-l-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi Sittin 'Aman* ['The Bitter Harvest: The Muslim Brotherhood during Sixty Years'], n.d., available at www.tawhed.ws, last accessed February 2014. See also Marc Lynch, 'Islam Divided between Jihad and the Muslim Brotherhood', in Moghadam, *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, 161-183.

[7] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 50"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 41"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 29-30".

[8] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 42".

Hamas' participation in the 2006 elections. Despite Hamas' victory, the video claims, its project failed, which shows that 'the solution is al-Qaeda, not Hamas.'[9]

Even more severely criticised is Hezbollah, especially since the 2006 Lebanon War, which was claimed as a victory by the Shia movement and gave a boost to its popularity throughout the region. 'But what victory?' al-Zawahiri wonders. Hezbollah was disarmed, had to retreat thirty miles and allowed UN troops on its territory. If Nasrallah was unable to continue resistance, al-Zawahiri asks, then why did he not follow the method of people such as Dzhokhar Dudayev (1944-1996), Shamil Basayev (1965-2006) and Mullah 'Omar, 'who had abandoned government positions, cabinet posts and squabbles over portion and booty, and turned into leaders of jihad in the mountains, forests, woodlands and countryside against the invaders of the lands of Islam?' The answer, al-Zawahiri knows, is that 'the issue is one of achieving political presence at any cost, and all that in the name of al-Husayn!' Yet, according to the Egyptian, imam Husayn wanted to oppose tyranny and re-establish the dignity of Islam. And for that reason, he concludes in a blatant attempt to appropriate the Shia icon, 'the people of today most deserving of Imam Husayn are the jihadists.'[10] Hence, just as practising *da'wa*, participating in politics is framed as a futile effort to restore the *umma*'s dignity. Instead, jihad is the solution.

8.2 Migration, preparation and *ribat*

According to al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, the waging of jihad consists of several stages. Three phases should precede actual combat, they claim: *hijra* (migration), *i'dad* (preparation) and *ribat* (guarding the frontlines). These stages, which are derived from the writings of 'Abdullah 'Azzam, are modelled on the *Sunna* and *manhaj* of the Prophet, al-Sahab argues, and therefore they provide a blueprint for victory.[11]

The first stage of waging jihad is based on early Islamic sources, in which the act of migration is closely associated with Muslims who are oppressed (*mustad'af*) by unbelievers.[12] The Quran states that Muslims should not resign themselves to such situations, but emigrate – an act for which they will be rewarded (e.g. Q. 4:97). Evidently, the most well-known of these migrations is Muhammad's *hijra* from Mecca to Medina in 622. It is particularly this event that serves as a paradigm for jihadists leaving their birthplaces to join the jihad, as can be witnessed from al-Sahab's martyrdom videos.

According to al-Sahab, Muhammad too, found himself in a situation of oppression. His message of monotheism was increasingly resisted by his fellow

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[9] Ibidem, 11". On al-Qaeda's disputes with Hamas, see Reuven Paz, 'Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists: al-Qa'ida and Hamas', in Moghadam, *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, 203-19.

[10] Ibidem, 56-70". For the online disputes between al-Qaeda and Hamas and Hezbollah, see also Weimann, 'Virtual Disputes', 625-7.

[11] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 45"; *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 17", 24" and 32"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 2-3"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 43". For 'Azzam's description of the stages, see *Ilhaq bi-l-Qafila* ['Join the Caravan'], at www.tawhed.ws n.p., last accessed September 2013 (English transl. at www.religioscope.com, last accessed September 2013).

[12] Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford/New York 1983) 51-53.

tribesmen of the Quraysh in Mecca, and eventually his position became untenable. The Muslims were no longer able to serve God as they had been ordered to do and did not want to live under oppression. Yet, instead of resigning himself to this situation, Muhammad 'emigrated with his religion', and ordered his followers to do the same.[13] In al-Sahab's view, today's Muslims find themselves in a comparable situation.[14] They are equally oppressed by unbelievers, and the people adhering to the Prophet's strict monotheism (*tawhid*) are persecuted, imprisoned and tortured. Therefore, the message is: Muslims should not resign themselves to their situation, but migrate after the example of the Prophet and God's command (e.g. Q. 4:100, 8:72, 74, 9:20).[15] They should follow the jihadists who already left their birthplaces as *muhajirun* ('emigrants') to seek refuge at Medinan-like *ansar* ('helpers'), such as the Afghan Taliban. Only this will enable them to undertake the next stage of jihad: preparation.[16]

For the second stage too, Muhammad serves as the model. According to al-Sahab, the Prophet had left Mecca for Medina to prepare his revenge against the Quraysh, which he took after eight years by conquering his birthplace. Likewise, al-Sahab argues, today's Muslims are obliged to flee from oppression and prepare for battle in order to return victoriously in the end. Afghanistan was considered exceptionally suitable for this purpose, especially in the late 1990s, when the Islamic Emirate provided the opportunity 'to fulfil the obligation of preparing.'[17] It was an exemplary 'training ground' that enabled jihadists to prepare 'their awaited battle against the superpower that now has sole dominance over the globe', as al-Zawahiri once wrote.[18] Jihadists fully profited from this opportunity, al-Sahab claims, as a 'solid base' was established here and the 'ranks were closed' between different groups and organisations such as the Egyptian Jihad, the Taliban and al-Qaeda.[19] Moreover, as we have seen before (Ch. 6.3.3), they did not only prepare themselves physically for battle, but training in devotion was considered equally important, if not more important.[20] This combination of warfare and spiritual practice is also closely connected to the third stage of the process: *ribat*.

The term *ribat* has many connotations, but is mostly used to refer to guarding the borders of the Muslim lands.[21] In the ninth century, ascetic communities arose at

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[13] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 47"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 26"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 22-23".

[14] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 26".

[15] In addition to the biography of the Prophet, the videos refer to Quran verses such as 8:74: 'But those who have believed and emigrated and fought in the cause of God and those who gave shelter and aided - it is they who are the believers, truly. For them is forgiveness and noble provision.'

[16] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 26"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 12"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 29".

[17] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 12-13".

[18] Al-Zawahiri, *Fursan tahta Rayat al-Nabi* ['Knights under the Banner of the Prophet'] at www.tawhed.ws, n.p., last accessed February 2013; Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 204.

[19] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 16-17" and 39"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 21".

[20] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 20"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 33-34".

[21] On the different connotations of the term, see Nasser Rabbat, 'Ribāt', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden 2010) at www.referenceworks.brillonline.com, last accessed August 2013.

the fringes of the Muslim empire, which are referred to as the *murabitun* ('those performing *ribat*'). These *murabitun* combined battling the enemies in these border areas with the interior struggle against evil: the *jihad al-nafs*.[22] With their ascetic lifestyle and mystical interpretation of Islam, they would play an important role in the emergence of Sufism. Their warlike monasticism, however, is strongly reminiscent of jihadist discourse as expressed in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos.

Although practising *ribat* is not very explicitly commented upon in al-Sahab's videos, it repeatedly returns in more implicit ways. As we have already noticed (Ch. 6.4.2), the suicide bombers who are featured in the videos downplay earthly existence. In their footsteps, al-Sahab repeatedly recommends its viewers to abandon their luxurious lives and detach themselves from the world. In its call to 'renounce this world', it usually employs the Arabic root *z-h-d*, which is associated with the ascetic lifestyle of the early *murabitun* and their spiritual virtue of *zuhd* ('asceticism', 'renunciation', 'detachment').[23] Moreover, just as was the case with the early *murabitun*, al-Sahab typically combines the idea of renouncing existence with the 'struggle in the way of God', both in the physical and spiritual sense. 'You should give priority to self-discipline', one of the videos explicates this point, 'and you must make *jihad al-nafs* and other types of jihad.'[24] The combination of asceticism, the jihad of the sword and the jihad of the soul that characterised the *murabitun*, thus also typifies al-Sahab's representations of the men who left their birthplaces to devote themselves to the 'struggle in the way of God' at the fringes of the Muslim world.

8.3 Jihad

In al-Sahab's martyrdom videos, migration, preparation and *ribat* are presented as essential to arrive at what 'Azzam called 'the zenith of Islam': jihad. Along the lines of Bin Laden's 1996 Declaration of War (see Ch. 3.3.4), al-Sahab's martyrdom videos extensively argue that jihad is an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) in the current situation of occupied Muslim lands.[25] Besides, they insist that jihad should be waged because it was the method of Muhammad.[26] 'He participated in 28 raids (*ghazawat*) to raise the banner of *tawhid*', one of the bombers remarks, and another one says: 'If we closely study the life of the Holy Prophet and analyse the mission that kept him occupied till his last breath, we will find that it was jihad.' Even just before he died, the bomber explains, Muhammad was occupied with dispatching an army to fight the Byzantines. Hence, he concludes, Muslims should follow his example.[27]

Yet the waging of jihad is also presented as valuable in itself. In al-Sahab's representations, struggling in the way of God is associated with the abandonment of

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[22] Cf. Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 44-8.
[23] See, for example, the quotation from 9/11 bomber al-Haznawi's last will in Ch. 6.4.2 (*Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 40").
[24] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 40".
[25] See, for example, al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 27-50"; *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 5-12".
[26] Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 24".
[27] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 22-23"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 42-43".

comfort and luxury for a life in hardship in the service of God.[28] Hence, jihad is fully in line with the ideal of renunciation, which plays such an important role in jihadist discourse. In addition, al-Sahab associates the waging of jihad with honour and dignity – virtues that we will further elaborate on when discussing suicide attacks in the next section. At this stage, it is important to note that al-Sahab's portrayal of jihad sharply contrasts with its representation of the *umma*: whereas the former is associated with honour and dignity, the latter is characterised by weakness and humiliation. Moreover, al-Sahab explicitly connects the two. The videos frequently emphasise that Muslims' abandonment of jihad is one of the major causes of the current state of the *umma*. 'The abandonment of jihad and the humiliation of the *umma* (...) go hand in hand', a video states, and another one adds that 'the major calamities that the *umma* is experiencing are a result of its abandonment of jihad and its inclination towards the worldly life.'[29] Because Muslims are attached to earthly life, jihad has become a 'neglected duty', al-Sahab argues, and, as a consequence, the *umma* has been punished by God.

Nevertheless, according to al-Sahab, the opposite is also true. Once the *umma* re-embraces jihad, its humiliation will be lifted. The history of the *umma* has demonstrated this, it argues. 'Study your history', one of the videos advises: 'As long as the Muslims kept the banner of jihad high, they ruled the whole world.'[30] Therefore, the videos emphasise, today's Muslims too, should abandon their luxurious lives and follow the method of the Prophet in order to restore the honour of Islam in the world. 'By God', one of the 9/11 bombers exclaims, 'we surely know that there is no way for the *umma* to get out of what it is in, except by establishing jihad, that neglected duty.'[31] Hence, al-Sahab's prognostic framing emphasises that jihad is the solution for the *umma*'s problems: it is the 'medicine' that can heal the diagnosed illness.[32] The Saudi 9/11 bomber al-Haznawi vividly summarises this view in a poem:

> If the night of pain is prolonged and the wounded *umma* becomes sleepless
> The breaking of dawn is coming and the rising of the sun of honour is near
> And the night of shame shall vanish
> We shall bring back the life of honour once more
> And we shall defeat those who disbelieve
> (…)
> The path of jihad is a must in our faith
> And God is the helper and from Him we await victory[33]

According to the Saudi, victory is close when the *umma* awakes from its slumber. Once sleeplessness (*sahar*) dominates and Muslims fulfil their obligation to wage jihad, the enemies shall be defeated. Then, darkness will fade and the sun of honour will appear at the horizon.

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[28] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 10".
[29] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 23"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 38".
[30] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 43". See also *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 20-22".
[31] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 13-14". See also *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 25".
[32] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 22".
[33] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 10-11".

In sum, the path of migration, preparation, *ribat* and jihad is essential in al-Sahab's prognostic framing. What is left implicit so far, however, is the precise way in which the jihad should be waged. At this point, al-Sahab's prognostic framing deviates from the solution proposed by 'Azzam in the 1980s. Al-Sahab, namely, spares no effort to underline the importance of suicide attacks to heal the *umma*'s illness. As one of the protagonists of its videos comments: 'We found no other solution and no other cure than carrying out martyrdom operations.'[34]

8.4 'Martyrdom operations'

As it did with the stages of migration, preparation, *ribat* and jihad, so al-Sahab presents the execution of suicide attacks as a continuation of the practices of the predecessors. The attacks are labelled as *ghazawat* ('raids') and the perpetrators as *fursan* ('knights') to highlight their correspondence with the military expeditions of Muhammad and his companions.[35] As a result, suicide attacks are also considered the way towards victory. The 'raids' are compared with the battles of Badr and Khaybar, where Muhammad and his men defeated the Meccans and a Jewish tribe living in an oasis on the Arabian Peninsula, respectively. The bombers are related to Khalid ibn al-Walid, who had reportedly been victorious in over a hundred of battles against Arabs, Byzantines and Persians, and to Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin, 1137-1193), who had beaten the Crusaders in the Battle of Hittin and recaptured Jerusalem.[36] Just as these men 'who sacrificed much for the sake of God', the method of today's 'martyrdom seekers' will lead the *umma* towards triumph, the videos suggest. Yet the question remains how, exactly, the path leading from migration, preparation, *ribat* and jihad to 'martyrdom operations' will lead towards success. How will it defeat the enemy and eradicate the humiliation of the *umma*?

According to al-Sahab, the value of suicide attacks has already been proven. They have demonstrated to be an effective means in asymmetrical warfare and are the best way to 'wound the enemy' and 'strike fear in their hearts', one of the videos claims (cf. Ch. 5.2).[37] Their effectiveness has been shown in battlefields such as Iraq, as the more than 800 suicide attacks that were carried out by al-Zarqawi and his men there had broken 'the arrogance of the Pharaoh of this age', a video from 2007 states.[38] In addition, the individual attacks featured in the videos are presented as

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[34] Ibidem, 45".

[35] Compare, for example, the titles of the videos *The Wills of the Martyrs of the Raids* (ghazwatayn) *on New York and Washington; Knowledge is for Acting upon: The Manhattan Raid* (ghazwa); *The Wills of the Knights* (fursan) *of the London Raid* (ghazwa); *The Word is the Word of the Swords: the Raid* (ghazwa) *of the Muezzin, Abu Gharib al-Makki*.

[36] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 1"; *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 36-37"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Haznawi*, 58"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1* and *Part 2*, passim; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 8"; *The Power of Truth*, 10-11"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 35-36"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 51".

[37] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 6".

[38] Although the American decision to withdraw its troops from Iraq was not yet finalised in 2007, resistance against the war had strongly increased both among the American public and in U.S. Congress. Yet, in my opinion, al-Sahab's claim (*Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 17-18")

huge successes (cf. Ch. 5.3). A telling example is provided by the video *Jihad and Martyrdom* about the attack of the Egyptian commander Abu al-Hasan. This 45-minute video first presents a lengthy biography of this first-generation jihadist, and then explains how he was finally allowed to carry out a 'martyrdom operation' during the war in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks. Subsequently, the video depicts the attack by means of a computer simulation, while one of Abu al-Hasan's peers, the little known Saudi Abu Khalil al-Madani, provides an oral account of the operation. The attack was supposed to strike an American convoy, the Saudi recounts, but initially the convoy did not show up at the expected place. When Abu al-Hasan decided to go home, however, God withheld him from doing so by sending an enormous rain shower. The river overflowed and the road became impassable, Abu Khalil recounts, so Abu al-Hasan had to wait. And then, suddenly, the Americans still arrived: four Humvees protecting a truck 'carrying important cargo' and a bulldozer that had joined to repair the road. Hence, Abu al-Hasan approached the convoy and he detonated his charge, the Saudi narrates while the simulation visualises his account. 'Nothing remained of them', Abu al-Khalil concludes, 'all four cars, the bulldozer and the truck, nothing was left of any of them.'[39]

As in many other cases, the suicide attack carried out by the Egyptian commander is presented as a great success.[40] But it was not just an ordinary success: it was a success with the help of God, who sent a miraculous rain shower that eventually brought the attacker and his target together. By including such a miraculous event in its account, al-Sahab aligns its narrative with jihadist discourse as it had developed since the 1980s. 'Abdullah 'Azzam's writings also contain dozens of miracles, among which are sudden rain showers.[41] But the miraculous rainfall in al-Sahab's account also aligns Abu al-Hasan's attack with the battles that were fought by Muhammad and his companions, which often also include miracles like these. During the Battle of Badr, for example, God is believed to have not only sent angels to their assistance, but also heavy rain showers, which were used by the Muslims to quench their thirst and perform ablutions, and meanwhile prevented their adversaries from advancing (cf. Q. 8:11). Hence, by including the sudden rain shower in its representation, al-Sahab once again represents the jihadist battle as a continuation of the battles of the predecessors, thus suggesting that God is fighting on their side and will lead them towards success, just as He had done at Badr in the first century after the *hijra*.

Miraculous events that confirm God's support are a recurring theme in al-Sahab's depictions of suicide attacks. Many bombers are reported to have had

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overemphasises the effect of suicide attacks, also because many of the attacks had not targeted American troops.

[39] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 41-44".

[40] In this case, this is remarkable, however. Most probably, Abu al-Hasan carried out his suicide attack on 28 June 2007, when a truck bomb struck a NATO convoy in the eastern Afghan province of Paktika. The timing and place of this attack fit the release of the video, the description of the bomb truck ('carrying wood') resembles the truck in al-Sahab's video footage and animation, and the fact that the convoy returned from a road construction project agrees with Abu Khalil's account. Yet, rather than destroying the entire convoy, the Paktika attack killed only one Afghan civilian. See ISAF News Release, 'Suicide Bomber Kills 1 Afghan Civilian in Paktika', 28 June 2007, at http://www.nato.int , last accessed August 2013.

[41] Cf. 'Azzam, *The Lofty Mountain*, 27 and 107.

dreams or visions before their attack that foretold the success of their missions and announced their martyrdom.[42] Some bombers are told to have encountered martyred friends in their dreams, which was taken as a sign that they would join them soon.[43] Others had concrete visions of their own suicide attacks. Abu al-Hasan, for example, not only had a dream foretelling the success of 9/11, he also had dreams that announced his own martyrdom.[44] Furthermore, after the suicide attacks, the men's corpses and graves also became subject of miraculous events. According to the martyrdom videos, some 'martyrs' had an everlasting smile on their face and others a radiant light shining from their body, while their graves are told to have emanated the heavenly scent of musk, in some cases for more than forty days after their death.[45] These themes too, are strongly inspired by early Islamic martyrdom traditions and therefore perceived as proof that suicide attacks are the right means to continue Muhammad's struggle against evil.[46] They indicate that 'our way is the right way on a straight path', as a *nashid* about jihad and martyrdom expresses the view that suicide attacks will lead towards victory.[47]

Nevertheless, the precise role of suicide attacks in the battle with the 'crusader alliance' remains rather indistinct. On the contrary, al-Sahab repeatedly underscores the enemy's military superiority, suggesting that an imminent victory over the 'crusader alliance' is not to be suspected. The videos frequently call for *sabr*, an important Islamic virtue that, in this respect, refers to patience and perseverance in the struggle in the way of God.[48] In addition, the videos do not offer a concrete alternative for the current situation. In line with other jihadist statements and writings, the reestablishment of a caliphate 'based on the Prophetic model' is mentioned, but not concretised (see Ch. 3.5).[49] The most tangible vision is probably expressed by Sheikh Atiyatallah, a senior al-Qaeda operative and confidant of Bin Laden, who states that 'the whole [political] programme is obvious to the one who wants to see it.' 'When we dominate and rule', he adds, 'you will see our political and non-political program, God willing.'[50] Vague comments like these characterise the videos' attitude towards the future, for which any concrete programme seems to be lacking.

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[42] A vision (*ru'ya*) has a powerful meaning in Muslim tradition, because it implies that God is directly communicating with the receiver. Cf. Ian R. Edgar, 'The Dream Will Tell: Militant Muslim Dreaming in the Context of Traditional and Contemporary Islamic Dream Theory and Practice', *Dreaming* 14 (2004) 21-9; Idem, 'The Inspirational Night Dream in the Motivation and Justification of Jihad', *Nova Religio* 11 (2007) 59-76.

[43] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 13".

[44] Cf. Bin Laden's video statement of 13 December 2001 (English transl. at http://archives.cnn.com , last accessed July 2013); Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 39-40".

[45] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 8-9". This scene features a man who prepared for a suicide attack, but was killed in a bombardment before his departure.

[46] Cf. Cook, *Martydom in Islam*, 117-24.

[47] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 19-20".

[48] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 32", 39" and 42".

[49] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 32"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 26"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 75".

[50] Al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 37-39".

Prominent scholars such as Olivier Roy have considered the absence of a strategic agenda and genuine goals as jihadism's main weakness.[51] Yet it might be more interesting to ask why jihadists do not seem to be much interested in concrete military strategies to defeat the enemy, nor in plans for organising society after victory has been achieved. Apparently, their violence is not so much aimed at achieving a military or political triumph – aims which, after all, presuppose an instrumental perspective on the use of violence. Instead, al-Sahab's videos seem to suggest that the proposed path of migration, preparation, *ribat* and jihad culminates in the execution of 'martyrdom operations'. Suicide attacks seem to represent the terminus on the way to the solution for the *umma* or, perhaps more precise, they represent the solution itself. But what, then, does this solution involve? What do suicide attacks represent or express that makes them victorious? Rather than looking at al-Sahab's framing of suicide attacks as a means towards victory, it is helpful here to scrutinise the meanings that are attributed to violence in the martyrdom videos. Two clusters of meanings are particularly noteworthy for our purpose: one concentrating on the virtues of honour and dignity and the other on self-sacrifice and purification. These themes hardly have been addressed in current literature on jihadist suicide attacks, but are fundamental to comprehend the jihadist movement and its violence, as the final section of this chapter will argue.

8.5 The meanings of martyrdom

8.5.1 Honour and dignity

Central to the meanings attributed to jihadist suicide attacks in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos are honour and dignity. Research on violence has demonstrated that jihadist suicide attacks are no exception in this respect, since honour and dignity are frequently associated with cases of violence and bloodshed.[52] Particularly in cultures with a strongly developed sense of honour, public insult and humiliation (i.e. the violation of honour), can result in feelings of shame that, in turn, may fuel violence.[53] In these cases, violence can be experienced as redeeming the honour of the insulted individual or the status of the group (family, tribe, religious community, etc.). It is experienced as honorific and, because it is often connected to masculinity as well, as restoring the reputation of manliness.[54]

These insights are crucial to grasp the meanings attributed to suicide attacks in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. In the videos, the violence is regularly associated with a cluster of terms signifying honour, dignity, power, courage and manliness. The Arabic terms *'izza* ('honour', 'power', 'glory') and *karama* ('dignity', 'honour',

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[51] Cf. Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 55-7 and 321-5.
[52] Cf. Anton Blok, 'Introduction', in idem, *Honour and Violence* (Cambridge 2001) 1-13.
[53] For an exploration of the concepts of honour and shame in the (European) Mediterranean, see David D. Gilmore, *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington 1987).
[54] Blok, 'The Meaning of "Senseless" Violence', 105; Dov Cohen, Joseph Vandello and Adrian K. Rantilla, 'The Sacred and the Social: Cultures of Honour and Violence', in Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews (eds.), *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture* (Oxford 1998) 261-82 at 261-3.

'respect') are fundamental in this respect. Both are used dozens of times throughout the videos, for instance in remarks such as 'the battles of New York and Washington embodied the meanings of honour and dignity' and 'the youth and men are leaping towards the fields of honour and dignity (*'izza wa-karama*).'[55] Frequently, these terms are used in combination with terms such as courage (*shaja'a*), pride (*nakhwa*), strength (*quwa*) and manliness (*rujula*).

What these terms evoke is the tribal context of the pre-Islamic *jahiliyya*. Central to the ethical principles and virtues of the Arab nomads on the Arabian Peninsula was loyalty to the community (*asabiyya*), and especially to the tribe, which constituted the basis of the social structure. The honour of individuals was strongly related to the loyalty to and protection of the kinship group. Accordingly, when the kinship group was insulted, dishonoured or humiliated, revenge was crucial to restore its honour, and often violence was considered the appropriate means to do so. Warriorship was therefore perceived as honourable, and represented the opposite of weakness and humiliation.[56]

The ideas of loyalty, honour and revenge were largely adopted by the early Muslims. Yet, since the *hijra*, they were primarily applied to the religious community, the *umma*, rather than to the kinship group.[57] Honour was redefined as a self-denying loyalty to God and the *umma* rather than to the tribe. Consequently, it was now the reputation of the *umma* that had to be protected and, in case of humiliation, revenged.[58] This was the context in which the notion of jihad was developed, as a result of which it is closely connected to virtues such as loyalty, honour and revenge in early Islamic sources.[59] Evidently, these sources cannot be translated one-to-one to the twenty-first century. The honour code of the Arab Bedouins and earliest Muslims has been transformed, redefined and renegotiated throughout the centuries. Their concept of honour, *'ird*, for example, is now primarily used in the context of family honour.[60] Yet shame and honour undeniably still play an important role in Arab societies.[61]

From this perspective, al-Sahab's emphasis on honour and dignity can be better comprehended. In its martyrdom videos, al-Sahab regularly stresses the importance of loyalty to the Muslim community. While the 'apostate leaders' and their scholars have disassociated themselves from the *umma*, jihadists are portrayed as the ones

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[55] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 4"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 40".

[56] Cf. Firestone, *Jihad*, 30-6.

[57] The so-called Constitution of Medina, which was drafted between the different tribes of Medina after Muhammad's migration, is considered significant in the shift from tribal to religious loyalty. Cf. Saïd Amir Arjomand, 'The Constitution of Medina: A Sociolegal Interpretation of Muhammad's Act of Foundation of the *Umma*', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009) 555-76.

[58] Timothy Winter, 'Honor', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* 3 (Leiden 2013) 447-8.

[59] This is convincingly argued in Firestone, *Jihad*.

[60] Cf. Peter C. Dodd, 'Family Honor and the Forces of Change in Arab Society', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1973) 40-54.

[61] See, for example, the insightful book of Philip Carl Salzman, *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (New York 2008), on the importance of tribal organisation of cultures in the contemporary Middle East.

who have stayed loyal to God and his people.[62] They stood up for the *umma*, 'turning their chests into shields protecting their religion.'[63]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the *umma* is perceived as being humiliated and disgraced by the 'crusaders and Jews'. It has been harassed by infidel forces and its honour has been violated in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Jihadists, then, are presented as the ones who were ashamed of the fate of the *umma* and attempted to restore its dignity by taking revenge. As one of the 9/11 bombers expresses this view: 'I take no pleasure in a life of humiliation (*dhull*), and my heart has demanded from me that I live honourably (*'aziza*) in compliance with my Lord's religion, even if that entails leaving loved ones and emigrating.' Hence, he emigrated, he explains, to retaliate the disgrace of his community by fighting God's enemies. 'I have gone out in search of training and means of preparation for jihad, so that I might kill Americans and other enemies of Islam and avenge my brothers' blood', he states, referring to the killing of Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, the Philippines, Burma, Kosovo and elsewhere. He avenged the dishonouring of his community, and 'went out to die with honour', as he concludes his statement. Whatever the results on the battlefield, he suggests, his attack was an honourable deed.[64]

Along these lines, al-Sahab depicts jihadist suicide attacks as revenging the humiliation and disgrace of the *umma*. The enemy too, should be humiliated, the videos frequently state: 'We want to humiliate and degrade them, for we want them to know their status', one video states, to which Bin Laden adds: 'Let them taste what we tasted in Sabra and Shatila, Deir Yasin, Qana, al-Khalil and other places.'[65] Rather than dismissing these remarks as a mere 'eye for an eye' mentality, they can be better understood in the context of the concepts of loyalty, honour and revenge. 'Without a shower of blood, shame is not whipped from the faces', a *nashid* in one of the videos sounds.[66] Hence, by humiliating the enemy just as they humiliated the Muslims, jihadists redeem the honour of the *umma*, and thus eliminate its humiliation and disgrace.

The videos spare no effort to underscore this point. Suicide attacks 'eradicate the humiliation that has overcome the lands of Islam', they state, and they 'remove the weakness, feebleness and humiliation that the *umma* is experiencing currently.' They bring an end to 'the age of cowardice and weakness', 'restore the dignity of the *umma*' and 'open the door to victory.'[67] These statements indicate that suicide attacks are perceived as actions that redeem the honour of the Islamic community more than as means to defeat the enemy on the battlefield. They do not so much

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[62] Al-Sahab, *Martyrs of the Two Holy Places*, 39-40"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 35".
[63] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 8".
[64] Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Heroes*, 50-54".
[65] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 14-15 and 35". In this statement, Bin Laden refers to a number of massacres for which Israel is held responsible: the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1982, the massacre in the village of Deir Yassin in 1948, the Qana shelling by the IDF in Lebanon in 1996 and the Hebron massacre by the Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein in 1994.
[66] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 10".
[67] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 27-28"; *The Wills of the Heroes*, 6-7"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 26"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 4-5"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 4".

represent a means towards political or military dominance, but are victorious in themselves.

8.5.2 Sacrifice and purification

The first cluster of terms is not necessarily related to suicide attacks. Expressing loyalty to the community and redeeming its honour by taking revenge does not necessarily entail physical self-destruction. This is different with regard to the second cluster of meanings that is given to the violence, which revolves around the concepts of (self-)sacrifice and purification.

As we have noted in the previous chapter, al-Sahab also depicts the *umma* as defiled. The 'crusader forces' roaming the Muslim world and the 'apostates' among the Muslim leaders and scholars have desecrated the lands of Islam. The earth has become impure and is in need of purification, the videos emphasise. As scholars of religion have frequently observed, this is a common pattern among fundamentalist movements. The dichotomisation of the world in 'good' and 'bad' that usually characterises these movements, calls for strict boundaries between the own group and the 'polluted' outside world. This typically implies the view that the purity of the own group should be safeguarded. The impure should be avoided and, once it has penetrated the group, removed. Such a desire for purification of the community can result in violence in order to remove the source of pollution. More precisely, it often results in sacrificial violence. Sacrifice, a term derived from the Latin *sacrificium* (lit. 'to make holy'), implies violence that not only kills, but also ennobles, transforms or 'makes holy'. The ritualised bloodshed is experienced as removing pollution and cleansing the community from defilement. It thus restores the boundaries between 'good' and 'evil' – at least for the time being.[68]

Can these insights be applied to jihadists, who, as we have seen, also maintain strict boundaries between 'good' and 'evil' and desire purification of their community? In an influential article, Ivan Strenski has argued that 'human bombers' can indeed be conceived as 'sacrificial gifts' to God and their community. The bombers not only kill themselves, he argues, but, just as sacrifices, they are also, in a sense, 'made holy' through their acts. They are 'elevated to lofty moral, and indeed, religious, levels, as sacrificial *victims* themselves or as kinds of holy saints.'[69] Their sacredness even extends to the place of their sacrifice, Strenski argues, which becomes holy by contagion.[70] It is important to bear in mind, he emphasises, that the social aspect of suicide attacks is crucial in this respect, since it is the community that can accept or refuse the sacrifice of the bomber and, when accepting, elevates the bombers to a lofty status.[71]

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[68] Cf. Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (London 2003) 23-89; Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 170-4; Jones, *Blood that Cries out from the Earth*, 50-5, 135-7 and 150-5.

[69] Ivan Strenski, 'Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim "Human Bombers"', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15 (2003), 1-34 at 8 (emphasis in original).

[70] Strenski, 'Sacrifice', 25.

[71] That the community is indeed central in cases of religious violence is convincingly argued in Hans G. Kippenberg, 'Searching for the Link between Religion and Violence by Means of the Thomas-Theorem', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010) 97-115.

In the first place, we should realise that this perspective would be vehemently opposed by jihadists themselves, who, as we have learned, claim to uphold a strict interpretation of *tawhid*, which rules out the veneration of saint-like figures.[72] It is also evident that the bombers are elevated to a lofty status after their deaths. As martyrs, they are considered to dwell in the highest level of Paradise (*firdaws*) in the company of the prophets and the other martyrs from the history of Islam. In al-Sahab's videos, they are presented as such, for instance by superimposing their names or pictures on paradisiacal sceneries, or by depicting a green glow around their bodies, resulting in images that are reminiscent of traditional Islamic martyrdom iconography in general, and the depiction of the Shia imams 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn – men who are definitively regarded as 'kinds of holy saints' in the Shia world – in particular.[73]

In addition, we have seen that al-Sahab's videos underscore the self-sacrifice of the suicide bombers. They abandoned their earthly positions and possessions (Ch. 6.3.2) and downplayed earthly life (Ch. 6.4.2). The *dunya* ('world') was not their true dwelling, the videos emphasise, and bombers neither loved this life nor feared death.[74] Their attitude was one of renouncing worldly life (see Ch. 8.2), and this attitude, the videos suggest, culminated in their suicide attacks, when the bombers made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives in the way of God.[75] The terms that are used to describe this 'sacrifice' further support Strenski's argument. Next to terms emphasising the 'martyrdom' of the bombers (e.g. *'amaliyyat istishhadiyya*), al-Sahab typically phrases suicide attacks as 'presenting', 'delivering' or 'offering' of oneself, one's body or one's soul to God.[76] These terms express the idea of giving oneself to God in a sacrificial manner. The idea is expressed even more visually by Bin Laden, who, in several recordings, speaks of men who 'presented their heads on their palms, seeking the pleasure of God' (*qaddamu ru'usahum 'ala akuffihim yabtaghuna ridwan allah*).[77]

Finally, and most importantly for our purpose, suicide bombers are perceived as symbols of purity, and purification. As we have seen before (Ch. 6.3.3), rituals of purification play an important role in the preparations for a suicide attack. Before

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[72] Besides, Talal Asad (*On Suicide Bombing*, 43-4) objected to Strenski's argument that, according to traditional Muslim notions of sacrifice, neither the *sacrifiant* nor the victim is 'made holy' through the sacrifice. Instead, Asad states, sacrifices are made in reply to a divine command, as thanks to a deity or as a sign of repentance, all of which do not fit with the Islamic concept of martyrdom. Although Asad makes an important point here, we should also acknowledge – as Asad will certainly do – that the Muslim tradition is not fixed. Accordingly, the perspective of jihadists could diverge from traditional Muslim notions of sacrifice, which, after all, is also the case with their views regarding the concept of martyrdom. I would rather suggest that jihadists' views on martyrdom and sacrifice have been influenced by Shia reinterpretations of the (self-sacrificial) death of imam Husayn (see Ch. 6.1.2).

[73] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 32-33"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1* and *Part 2*, 2-3"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 0-3".

[74] On the overcoming of fear for death, see Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 62-9.

[75] Much psychological research has indicated that the attitude of renunciation and indifference regarding the human body connects well with feelings of humiliation and shame. Cf. Jones, *Blood that Cries out from the Earth*, 37.

[76] Usually, the Arabic roots *q-d-m* or *j-d-w* are used.

[77] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 2*, 35-36"; *The Wills of the Heroes*, 19".

their mission, suicide bombers attain a state of purity that foreshadows their future status as martyrs. Accordingly, in al-Sahab's videos, the 'living martyrs' are repeatedly called emblems of purity (*tahara*, *naqa'*).[78] Moreover, after their death, they are presented as inherently pure. Their sins are considered to be forgiven with the first drop of blood, we noted (Ch. 6.3.4), and their blood is perceived as a symbol of their purity. The reports about the paradisiacal scent of musk surrounding their graves further underscore the perception that 'martyrs' have crossed the boundary from the polluted world to the purity of Paradise.

In line with the idea of suicide bombers as sacrificial gifts, it is not just the sacrificial victims that are perceived as being transformed by their ritualised death. By their actions, they also purify their community, the *umma*. The blood of the martyrs is particularly important in this respect. This becomes evident from al-Sahab's videos, in which the term blood (*dam*) is used more than 150 times. Often, the term refers to the blood of Muslims that is being shed and has to be retaliated by taking the blood of the enemies. For instance, one of the videos states that 'without the shedding of [the enemies'] blood, the humiliation will not be wiped from the foreheads', which underscores our findings in the previous subsection. But in many cases the term also refers to the blood of the 'martyrs' who, as they themselves say, 'sacrifice our blood for our religion.'[79]

In many cases, al-Sahab connects blood with terms such as washing and cleansing. For instance, in one of the videos, a group of fighters is shown while singing about 'protecting the sanctity of Islam' with their skulls and blood, after which a voice-over complements: 'Here are the heroes of Islam, who emerged to wash away the disgrace of humility and submissiveness from our foreheads.' In the same video, the Muslim youths are called to 'wash with your blood the humiliation of the *umma.*'[80] In statements like these, al-Sahab emphasises that the blood of the 'martyrs' removes the humiliation and shame of the *umma*: the stained honour is restored with blood. Along the same lines, al-Sahab contends, the blood of the 9/11 bombers 'purified the *umma* from the filth of the treacherous rulers and their followers.' In their footsteps, jihadists in Saudi Arabia attempted to 'purify the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries from the defilement of the crusader and Zionist occupation.'[81] Hence, as in many cases of violence, the blood of the perpetrators is viewed as purifying.[82] Through their self-sacrifice, the suicide bombers cleanse their community and restore the *umma*'s purity by washing away the pollution of the 'infidels', 'apostates' and 'hypocrites'.

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[78] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 3-4"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 6"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 27".

[79] Al-Sahab, *Martyrs of the Two Holy Places*, 33".

[80] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 3".

[81] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 3"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 29-30"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 34".

[82] On the symbolism of blood in cases of violence, see Anton Blok, 'The Blood Symbolism of *Mafia*', in idem, *Honour and Violence*, 87-102.

8.5.3 Victory

The blood of the 'martyrs' transforms and purifies its surroundings. It cleanses the earth and, hence, it enables new life. As in many cases, al-Sahab connects the themes of sacrifice, purification and bloodshed with fertility, renewal and rebirth.[83] Often, the accounts of the self-sacrifice of the bombers is accompanied by images of water flows, flowers in bloom and trees full of fruit, bringing to mind the gardens of Paradise, but also evoking an image of hope and new life. As a *nashid* says: 'God has opened the door, the door of *al-firdaws*, while my soul is overwhelmed with the melody of beautiful hope. Let the blood flow abundantly into the ground like a running wild river.'[84]

Like water in the desert, the blood of the 'martyrs' fertilises the earth of the parched lands of Islam. Yahya al-Libi says about one of the bombers: 'Let his blood and body be a sacrifice that waters the withered tree of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula.'[85] Using one of the Quranic terms for ritual sacrifice, *qurban*, al-Libi expresses the hope that the blood of the sacrificial victim will revive Islam in Saudi Arabia. In comparable terms, the blood of the bombers is expected to revive the neglected duty of jihad and, hence, bring victory. 'O God, water the tree of jihad with our blood', one of the 9/11 bombers prays in his last will, and a poem in the same video expresses: 'We shall water the ground with our blood to raise the banner of truth.'[86] According to al-Sahab's videos, the sacrificial blood of the bombers thus plays a crucial role in the achievement of victory. It even is a prerequisite for achieving victory, a bomber suggests: 'The religion of my Lord shall not be victorious until blood is shed.'[87]

In addition to removing the humiliation, disgrace and defilement of the *umma*, the self-sacrifice of the 'martyrs' thus symbolises the hope for revitalisation of the *umma* and, consequently, for redemption and victory. The bombers' 'supreme triumph', as the Quran typically phrases their dwelling in the gardens (e.g. Q. 9:72, 89, 100, 111), exemplifies the victory of the *umma*. The 'martyrs' offer them a way out of the darkness, the videos proclaim metaphorically by describing martyrdom as a 'bright light' and a 'lamp that has kindled the *umma*.' 'Martyrs' are like 'shining stars' who direct those who are lost 'in the midst of this darkness' to the right path, the path towards triumph.[88]

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[83] It is interesting to note that the Quran (96:1-2) connects the symbol of blood to the creation of men. *Sura* 96, which many Muslims believe to be the first *sura* revealed to Muhammad, starts with: 'Recite in the name of your Lord, who created; Created man from a blood clot (*'alaq*).'

[84] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, 34-37".

[85] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 17."

[86] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 17 and 27-28."

[87] Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Heroes*, 54."

[88] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 4-5"; *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 44; *Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, 19".

8.6 Conclusion

According to al-Sahab, the *umma* is the central protagonist in a cosmic battle against a coalition of enemies that represents evil on earth. Mainly due to the lethargy of the Muslims, the enemies have gained the upper hand, as a result of which the current state of the *umma* is characterised by terms such as weakness, humiliation, disgrace, oppression, defilement and darkness. In this chapter we have analysed how al-Sahab suggests to reverse this situation.

To shape its solution, al-Sahab extensively borrows from the accounts of the life of the Prophet. Based on this template, it dismisses a focus on either *da'wa* or politics, while proposing a staged model consisting of migration, preparation, *ribat* and jihad instead. Although this model is presented as following Prophet's migration, preparation and victorious return, we have also seen that it incorporates notions that are not based on Muhammad's biography, such as the virtue of *zuhd*. Fully in line with our observations on jihadist thought (see Ch. 3), we can therefore conclude that al-Sahab's solution is based on an amalgam of beliefs, values, virtues and practices that are revived and attributed with new meanings. Al-Sahab authorises its suggested solution by presenting it as the method of the Prophet, yet by reinterpreting this model, it is also made applicable to the practices of those jihadists who left their birthplaces, who migrated, often to the fringes of the Muslim world, and who are preparing to return victoriously in the end. Hence, it also authorises the practices of men such as Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri and, thus, al-Qaeda.

Suicide attacks are presented as the principal way in which jihad should be waged. As in the case of legendary Muslim fighters who sacrificed themselves for their religion, al-Sahab argues, 'martyrdom operations' will lead to victory, as the miraculous events surrounding the attacks confirm. Nowhere, however, does al-Sahab suggest that this road will lead to a rapid military triumph, nor does it imply that the conclusion of the cosmic conflict is at hand. Contrary to what is often claimed, suicide attacks do not primarily serve strategic objectives in this case. Instead, the social meanings of the violence provide the key to understanding the value of 'martyrdom operations' for the actors involved. The attacks are considered victorious in themselves, as they retaliate the bloodshed of Muslims by shedding the enemy's blood. Hence, they embody loyalty, honour, dignity, courage and power, and, accordingly, undo the weakness, humiliation and disgrace of the Muslim community. In addition, despite some obvious differences between ritual sacrifices and suicide attacks, the self-sacrifice of the bombers transforms or ennobles the 'sacrificial victim' in the eyes of its community, i.e. the jihadist movement. In its turn, the perceived purity of the 'martyr' extends to its environment by purifying the *umma*.

By thus viewing the attacks not in terms of military strategies, effectiveness and costs and profits, but in terms of shame and honour, defilement and purification, and death and rebirth, their alleged importance in the current situation can be better comprehended. Moreover, it elucidates the power of al-Sahab's appeal to the Muslim youths to rise and defend the honour of their religion, as the final chapter will argue.

9 The call to arms

After having explored al-Sahab's diagnosis of the state of affairs in the world and its solution for improving it, we proceed by examining the ways in which it attempts to motivate its audience to contribute to this solution. Hence, this final chapter scrutinises al-Sahab's efforts to mobilise the Muslim youths to join the jihad and seek out martyrdom, which is evidently one of the main objectives of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. In doing so, I will make an analytical distinction between four stages in al-Sahab's motivational framing. First, the chapter explores al-Sahab's attempts to facilitate its audience's identification with the *umma* in general and with the suffering of their fellow Muslims in particular (9.1). Then, presuming that the viewers' identification with the humiliation of the *umma* has been accomplished, the next section examines al-Sahab's efforts to guide the troubled watcher, who is searching for ways to assist his brothers and sisters, towards the jihadist movement by offering new authorities in the shape of jihadist leaders as well as role models in the shape of 'martyrs' (9.2). Subsequently, it focuses on the new community that al-Sahab offers its audience, the jihadist movement, paying particular attention to the crucial role of suicide attacks in al-Sahab's representation thereof (9.3). The chapter concludes by scrutinising al-Sahab's emotional appeal on its audience (9.4).

9.1 Facilitating humiliation

Feelings of humiliation are widely regarded as one of the primary incentives for activism in general and violence in particular.[1] It is therefore no surprise that the themes of humiliation and injustice are central to the framing strategies of many social movements.[2] As we have observed (Ch. 7.2.1), al-Sahab is no exception in this case. The *umma*'s humiliation is one of the main themes of its martyrdom videos and, moreover, the theme is essential to its efforts to achieve frame alignment.

Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos not only emphasise the humiliation of the rather abstract Muslim community in general. They also extensively elaborate on various concrete situations in which the cosmic conflict between the Muslims and their adversaries has manifested itself, such as the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine,

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[1] Cf. Jones, *Blood that Cries out from the Earth*, 36-40 and 137-9; Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (2003; Plymouth 2008) 75-9; Bettina Muenster and David Lotto, 'The Social Psychology of Humiliation and Revenge: The Origins of the Fundamentalist Mindset', in Charles B. Stroizer et al. (eds.) *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence, and History* (Oxford 2010) 71-9.

[2] On the centrality of humiliation and injustice in social movement framing, see Gamson, 'Constructing Social Protest', 90-4; Benford, 'Framing Processes', 615.

Saudi Arabia. By separately discussing these (perceived) battlefields, al-Sahab enables itself to pay attention to the specific local circumstances and events in these regions, and therefore to connect its narrative with the experiences of its audience there. This adds to the credibility and appeal of its message, as framing theory indicates.[3] Simultaneously, al-Sahab reframes the local experiences and concerns of its viewers in global terms. It connects the different battlefields in its narrative, which facilitates the viewers' perception that they are part of one and the same conflict between the *umma* and its enemies (cf. Ch. 4.3.1).

The videos do not only connect with the experiences of the people who are directly affected by the conflict, they also appeal to Muslims in other places of the world. They aim at invigorating feelings of 'humiliation by proxy', as the experience of humiliation through media has been called.[4] Besides vividly depicting the miserable situation of the *umma*, al-Sahab attempts to accomplish this purpose by aligning the jihadist narrative with several issues of shared concern among people in the Muslim world.

A prominent case of these so-called frame alignment strategies is the representation of Palestine in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. Although Palestine and the Palestinians have never played an important role in the jihadist movement, al-Sahab's first martyrdom videos frame Palestine as one of jihadism's major concerns.[5] They widely cover the suffering of the Palestinians and emphasise Palestine's importance for jihadism by framing it as 'the centre of a global conspiracy by the infidel powers.'[6] Moreover, the videos highlight some well-known symbols of the Palestinian struggle, such as the 12-year-old boy Muhammad al-Durrah (1988-2000), who was killed during crossfire on 30 September 2000. The footages and images of his death are incorporated in all of the first four martyrdom videos that were released by the media group.[7] The obvious reason for this, as well as for al-Sahab's general focus on Palestine in its first videos, has to be sought in the al-Aqsa Intifada, which had started in September 2000, some months before al-Sahab's first release. To connect with its viewers, al-Sahab aligned the jihadist cause with one of the major concerns among its audience: the suffering of the Palestinians by the hands of the 'Jews'. Yet when the intensity of the uprising diminished, al-Sahab's attention for the Palestinians and Israel (see Ch. 7.3.1) also decreased.[8]

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[3] According to Benford ('Framing Processes and Social Movements', 615-8), a frame needs to be important for the audience and therefore must relate to their experience in order to be successful.

[4] Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 152-3. An example is provided by the case of Nasir al-Bahri (Ch. 4.3.1).

[5] On the minor role of Palestine and the Palestinians in the jihadist movement, see Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 53-4.

[6] Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Heroes*, 14-15".

[7] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 13-14"; *The Wills of the Heroes*, 14"; *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 19"; *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 2". In a later release, (*Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 33") al-Zawahiri commented: 'The al-Aqsa Intifada left an open wound in the heart of each Muslim. Every Muslim, as he watched the bullets pierce the body of Muhammad al-Durra, felt that those bullets were piercing the body of his own child.' Nevertheless, the question who actually killed the boy has remained controversial.

[8] A comparable pattern is observable in al-Sahab's coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 and 2003, respectively. The shift in focus from Palestine to Afghanistan and Iraq can

In addition to specific conflict areas, the videos also focus on particular themes that were significant for a broader audience. For instance, they repeatedly discuss the torturing of prisoners in Afghanistan and Iraq, which aligns with the widespread discontent about the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and the rage about the prisoner abuse in, among others, Abu Ghraib.[9] Another example is provided by al-Sahab's extensive coverage of the killing of civilians in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area, which has been a growing concern in the region and beyond, especially since the U.S. increased the number of drone attacks in the second half of the 2000s.[10] A final example of al-Sahab's frame alignment strategies is its treatment of the so-called cartoon crisis.[11] Especially in the video *The Word is the Word of the Swords: the Raid of the Muezzin*, al-Sahab connects the jihadist cause with the perceived insulting of the prophet Muhammad in the *Jyllands Posten* cartoons of 2005. Themes such as blasphemy and insulting the Prophet had never played a part in jihadist discourse, but, after the widespread protests against the cartoons in 2006, al-Sahab decided to encompass the theme in its narrative as part of the 'assault on Islam' by the 'cohesive alliance that includes Americans, Europeans and Zionists.'[12]

These examples of al-Sahab's frame alignment strategies illustrate the media group's efforts to connect with its viewers. Al-Sahab recognises the local concerns of its audience and encompasses broadly shared grievances of Muslims throughout the world. It reframes these concerns and grievances as part of the global religious conflict as it is envisioned by jihadists, which facilitates and invigorates the viewers to identify with their fellow Muslims and experience humiliation by proxy. The result is a compelling call on the viewers of the videos to awake from their slumber and rise for the sake of their 'brothers and sisters'. One of the perpetrators of the Muhaya compound bombings exclaimed:

> Where are you, o jihadist youths? Your absence has lasted so long. Do you not know that your religion is being attacked and your Lord's law is being ridiculed? That your homes are being defiled, your women abused and your scholars jailed? And that

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also be noticed in the order in which the battlefields are presented in the videos. Whereas *The Destruction of the American Destroyer USS Cole* from 2001 starts its overview with Saudi Arabia and Palestine and thereafter discusses the situation in Chechnya, Iraq, Lebanon and Kashmir, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades* from 2008 starts with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, and then continues with the Maghreb, Palestine, Somalia and Chechnya, respectively.

[9] See, for example, a suicide bomber's lengthy account about his experiences in Sheberghan Prison in northern Afghanistan, where, according to him, some prisoners were buried alive, while thousands of others were put in shipping containers 'like sheep', after which many of them died of suffocation. Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 9-14".

[10] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 22-23". For the opposition in Pakistan against the means, see Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 'On Eve of Elections: a Dismal Public Mood in Pakistan', 7 May 2013, at www.pewglobal.org, last accessed October 2013.

[11] The cartoon crisis can be considered a case of frame bridging: the incorporation of formerly unrelated frames in order to align with its audience. Another remarkable case in this process, which falls outside the scope of this book, but is nevertheless worth mentioning, is provided by Bin Laden's message from 29 January 2010 (available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014), in which he, quoting Noam Chomsky, warned for global warming and blamed U.S. President Bush for not signing the Kyoto Protocol. See also Al Jazeera, 'Bin Laden Deplores Climate Change, 29 January 2010, at www.aljazeera.com, last accessed January 2010.

[12] Al-Sahab, *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 1".

> your fellow Muslim brothers are made either homeless or imprisoned? And that your countries have become commonplaces for worshippers of evil? Until when will your silence and falling back continue? What are you waiting for?[13]

Along these lines, the videos often directly appeal to the viewers not to stay behind their computer screens, but to get up and join the alleged defenders of the tormented *umma*: the jihadist movement.

9.2 Offering guidance

9.2.1 Authorities

Crucial to al-Sahab's efforts to stimulate the audience's identification with the jihadist movement is its portrayal of the movement's leaders, and particularly of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri.[14] Whereas al-Sahab's depiction of the movement remains rather indistinct, the leaders give it a face and embody its history and perceived merits. Al-Sahab repeatedly emphasises that al-Qaeda's leaders are first generation jihadists, and portrays them as practised fighters, not only by means of narratives, but also by means of iconography. Their visual representation is usually characterised by symbols such as Kalashnikovs, camouflage vests and the so-called 'black flag of jihad', recalling their jihadist careers since the war against the Soviets in the 1980s.[15] Through symbols such as these, al-Sahab presents the leaders as experienced and therefore authoritative jihadists.[16]

Besides, al-Qaeda's leaders are depicted as sincere and authentic religious authorities, and therefore as an alternative for so-called 'traditional' authorities such as the *ulama*. Since religious authority in the Muslim world is largely informal and

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[13] Al-Sahab, *Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2*, 3".

[14] Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are by far the most prominently featured of these leaders. Statements by jihadist leaders comprise about twenty per cent of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. Approximately half of these statements are delivered by Bin Laden, one-fourth by al-Zawahiri and the remaining one-fourth by others such as 'Abdullah 'Azzam, Mustafa Abu al-Yazid and Abu Yahya al-Libi.

[15] As far as I know, al-Qaeda used the black banner for the first time when announcing the establishment of the World Islamic Front in 1998, after which it has become a symbol of the global jihad.

[16] I consider authority a social process. Persons, institutions and objects such as texts and videos, are not inherently authoritative. Rather, they are regarded as such by others. To take the example of charismatic authority, this means that a person – usually a leader – is set apart from other persons because of 'supernatural, superhuman or, at least, exceptional powers or qualities.' These are not intrinsic qualities of the leader him- or herself. Rather, it is the followers who attribute these extraordinary traits to him or her. Applied to our subject, this means that al-Qaeda's leaders are not inherently authoritative, but (possibly) regarded as such by their audience. This section therefore asks how al-Sahab and al-Qaeda's leaders have *attempted* to establish authority and exercise the authority attributed to them. Cf. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 140-2.

decentralised, it is mainly dependent on trust, credibility and reputation.[17] Moreover, as noted before (Ch. 3.5), religious authority is increasingly fragmented. Traditional authorities such as the *ulama* have lost part of their ability to define correct belief and practice. Meanwhile, new authorities have emerged, often via new ways and by employing different means. They have usually bypassed established religious institutions and lack formal designations, but are regarded as authorities because of their charisma and authenticity. The jihadist leaders who are featured in al-Sahab's videos are both products and agents of these developments.

In the martyrdom videos, *ulama* are vilified and framed as 'scholars of the books' who rely on their academic degrees and official appointments to exercise their influence.[18] The jihadist leaders, in contrast, are presented as spiritual leaders who are knowledgeable because of their experience and deep faith. They are designated with the title 'sheikh', evoking the image of Sufi masters guiding their pupils on their path towards God.[19] This image is supported by visual representations of the men. Particularly in pre-9/11 footage, when there was more freedom to depict the leaders in the most desirable way, they are often shown in the rough, mountainous landscape of Afghanistan and Pakistan, reminding viewers of ascetics who, outside the inhabited world, were seeking closeness to God.[20] Bin Laden is depicted as a man who was 'blessed with so much wealth and living a life of content.' Yet he did not care about earthly life, the videos tell us, and 'sacrificed everything for the sake of God.'[21] He always appears modestly clothed and is remarkably often shown in a humble position: sitting on a rug with a blanket on his legs or, perhaps even more frequently, kneeling. In several cases, al-Sahab's cameramen used low angle shots to record the al-Qaeda leader, not so much to make him look taller and more powerful – which this technique is most often used for – but rather to depict his face against the background of the sky, suggesting his closeness to God.[22] In other cases, he is shown in one of the training camps in Afghanistan while addressing the trainees: not as a detached scholar, but rather as a spiritual master who, in poetical language, narrates his experiences and explains his views amidst his pupils. The image evoked by recordings like these is that of a spiritual

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[17] Cf. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, 'Introduction: Religious Authority and Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies: A Critical Overview', in Eidem (eds.), *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden 2006) 1-14.

[18] Muhammad Yasir (1953-2012), an important Taliban ideologue who had been embraced by al-Sahab, claims in one of the videos that someone's authority is neither dependent upon the reputation of the university where he studied nor on having a master's degree, a PhD or a professoriate. Rather, he states, it comes down to faith and practice. Ironically, Yasir is introduced as *ustadh*, 'professor'.

[19] The term 'sheikh' (*shaykh*, 'elder') is broadly used for the chief of a human group such as the family or tribe, but can also refer to religious authorities. Sufi masters are also called 'sheikhs', and it is this meaning of the term that most closely reflects al-Sahab's representation of the jihadist leaders. Cf. Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 42-3.

[20] See, for example, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, which shows Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri walking through the mountains. In the video, the original eight-minute clip, which was probably recorded before the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, is split in several shorter clips and superimposed with recordings of statements by both leaders.

[21] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 33".

[22] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 4-5"; *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 21"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1* and *Part 2*, 1-2"; *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 30".

guide who has sacrificed his possessions for the sake of God – a striking contrast with the 'scholars of the palace'.[23]

Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos hardly include post-9/11 video footage of Bin Laden. Although several audio recordings from after this moment are incorporated, the producers chose not to include the more formal statements that Bin Laden delivered from his safe houses since 2002.[24] They do include many post-9/11 recordings of other leaders, though. Usually these leaders address the audience from provisional 'studios' and, as a result, their appearance, and especially that of 'doctor' al-Zawahiri, is often more static and formal than the pre-9/11 recordings.[25] Yet they are usually depicted modestly, and the set on which they are recorded is often simple, comprising a plain coloured wall or a curtain. The men are always modestly dressed, often wearing a white *thawb* (an Arab garment) and a turban, which fits with their designation as sheikhs. Like Bin Laden, they are mainly portrayed as religious authorities who are not dependent on their educational background or learning, but on their sincerity, experience and self-sacrifice.

Thus, in addition to fuelling the Muslim youths' identification with the *umma*, al-Sahab's martyrdom videos offer its audience authorities who are portrayed as authentic and trustworthy, and who fit remarkably well with contemporary forms of religious authority in the Muslim world. The viewers can put their trust into these leaders' hands, the videos suggest, and they can follow their lead to the liberation of the *umma*.

9.2.2 Role models

A comparable pattern is distinguishable in al-Sahab's portrayal of the suicide bombers. Even more so than al-Qaeda's leaders, they personify the jihadist movement. The biographies included in al-Sahab's martyrdom videos portray the suicide bombers as 'ordinary guys'.[26] They are mere 'errant sons of Adam', who were

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[23] This view is made explicit by the suicide bomber Hafiz Usman (d. 2006), who states in his farewell message: 'Look at sheikh Usama. He was the same Usama before, blessed with so much wealth and living a life of content. But today, after he has sacrificed everything for the sake of God, the mere thought of him terrifies Bush and gives him nightmares. Why? All because of his sacrifice for Islam. God has elevated him in status to such heights that he will be remembered for centuries by the *kuffar*, God willing.' Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 33".

[24] These statements had the character of more formal lectures and were often addressed to Western audiences (e.g. his video statement 'To the American People', 20 Oct. 2004), which could explain Bin Laden's portrayal as statesman. The fact that al-Sahab did not incorporate (parts of) these statements in its martyrdom videos underscores our observations that these videos purposefully portray Bin Laden as a spiritual authority. For examples of audio recordings that were included in the videos, see *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 1-8"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 0-14".

[25] The backdrops laid over the footage by al-Sahab sometimes even evoke the image of an Al Jazeera newsroom in which the leaders expose their views on the world. See for example al-Zawahiri's appearances in al-Sahab, *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*.

[26] Biographies of the suicide bombers are incorporated in thirteen of al-Sahab's martyrdom videos. Since this study is interested in al-Sahab's portrayal of the men, the correctness of the information that is provided is not very relevant.

living normal lives during their youth, al-Sahab emphasises.[27] The British bomber Shehzad Tanweer, for instance, was a 'lover of sports, who was working on his physical fitness', his biography states. 'He had a passion for boxing and, although he was from a well-off family, his clothes and appearance did not convey that.'[28] Moreover, according to the biographies, the men had been fully participating in their societies before they decided to join the jihad. Several of them are told to be from wealthy families, and some were enrolled in a university or had good jobs.[29] They were living 'a life of luxury and comfort', a video states about the 9/11 bombers, and 'they were definitely not failures looking for a way out.'[30] Hence, al-Sahab emphasises that the suicide bombers were no saints elevated far above the viewers, but ordinary men resembling the viewers themselves. By thus portraying the bombers, al-Sahab relates them to the lives of its audience and facilitates the viewers' identification with the men, and thereby with jihadism.

At the same time, al-Sahab also indicates that the suicide bombers already were exemplary figures during their youths. Along the lines of classical Islamic martyrologies, the videos repeatedly list virtues of the men, such as courageousness, modesty, perseverance, pureness and sincerity.[31] Two characteristics of the suicide bombers are emphasised in particular: their piousness and erudition. They are described as 'persons of worship' with 'strong faith in their hearts' who are 'examples of faithfulness'.[32] They loved to recite the Quran, the biographies often state, and one of them is even said to be 'obsessed' with the Holy Book.[33] They were also eager to perform night prayers (*tahajjud*) – voluntary prayers that therefore attest to the men's extraordinary piousness – and some of them performed the *hajj* to Mecca.[34] Moreover, their biographies present them as well-read Muslims who studied and, in several cases, memorised the Quran.[35] For example, the Saudi bomber 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Umari is portrayed as a man who studied with notable Saudi scholars and memorised the Quran in only two months, after which he also memorised *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. Hence, he could be considered a scholar himself, his biographer claims, which is underlined by designating him as 'sheikh' and '*alim*'.[36] Along these lines, the suicide bombers are portrayed as men

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[27] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 44".
[28] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 9". See also *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 1"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 26"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 4".
[29] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 1"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 9"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 26".
[30] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 0-1".
[31] For an overview of the different biographical genres in early Islamic literature, see Ch. Pellat, 'Manākib', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden 2010) at www.referenceworks.brillonline.com, last accessed August 2013. For an example of al-Sahab's listing of the bombers' virtues, see *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 3-8".
[32] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 6 and 12"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 11".
[33] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 6"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 9"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 27"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 35".
[34] Al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 27"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 33".
[35] Cf. Al-Sahab, Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Heroes*, 8"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 8-9"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 30-31"; *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 11".
[36] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 8-10 and 14".

who 'learned from the life of the Prophet.'[37] They are even 'more knowledgeable and understanding than the *ulama*', one of the videos expresses, and therefore they can be trusted as true followers of the *salaf*.[38] 'Just as the predecessors', Bin Laden remarks, 'they seek God's rewards instead of worldly gain.'[39]

This portrayal of the suicide bombers can be understood in several ways. First, al-Sahab's representation of the men as pious and erudite Muslims should be considered an attempt to reinforce the authority of the bombers and, thus, the persuasiveness of their farewell messages. Second, these remarks should be seen in the light of the debates about the legitimacy of suicide attacks. By stressing the bombers' prosperous backgrounds, piousness and learning, al-Sahab implicitly argues that their actions should be considered legitimate acts of devotion rather than ordinary suicides. Third, and most importantly for our purpose, the biographies portray the bombers as examples for the people watching the martyrdom videos. The bombers were ordinary men who studied their religion and started to act accordingly.

At some point in their lives, namely, the men became touched by the fate of their coreligionists, the biographies continue. Tanweer is said to have been affected by the suffering of the Iraqi, Afghan and Palestinian Muslims, and about another bomber it is said that 'the distress of the *umma* prevented him from sleeping.'[40] These men did not look the other way, but they stood up against the *umma*'s oppressors. Echoing farewell messages of the bombers themselves (see Ch. 6.4), the biographies emphasise that the men were prepared to sacrifice their lives in the way of God, and that they were even eager to do so. Tanweer and his peers, for instance, are said to be 'seeking martyrdom and wishing that they could carry out a martyrdom operation, and they were very insistent on that.'[41] The suicide bombers featured in the videos were zealous to pursue the path of the other martyrs from the history of Islam, and to follow their brothers to Paradise. 'May God join me with the brothers who were martyred in the events of 11 September, and bless me with the company of the holy Prophet and all those who have been martyred up to this day', one of the bombers requested in his farewell message.[42] The example of the nineteen bombers gave him the strength to execute his mission. Along the same lines, he, in turn, should empower and provide a role model for the viewers of his martyrdom video. They too, the videos imply, can transform themselves from ordinary young men into defenders of the humiliated *umma* and, eventually, join their brothers at the highest level of Paradise.

The image evoked by the bombers' biographies fits remarkably well with contemporary forms of religiosity (see Ch. 3.5). The bombers consciously deliberated on their religious tradition, undertook a personal quest for truth and authenticity, embraced new types of authorities, made a personal choice to join the jihad and, eventually, achieved self-realisation through their martyrdom. They therefore provide a powerful model for the viewers of the martyrdom videos. Once the viewers

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[37] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 12".
[38] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 11".
[39] Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 17".
[40] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 7"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 3".
[41] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 8".
[42] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 75-76".

have become affected by the fate of the *umma* and disappointed in the indifference of their surroundings, they too, it is suggested, should study the sources and undertake the quest for truth and self-realisation. This will inevitably lead them to the jihadist movement.

9.3 Offering a community

9.3.1 The umma's vanguard

Central to al-Sahab's portrayal of jihadism is the movement's position as the defender of the *umma* and, in this capacity, as the successor of the *salaf*. In the martyrdom videos, the movement is opposed to the *umma*'s enemies on the one hand, and to the *umma* itself on the other. We have seen that al-Sahab depicts a global conflict between the *umma* and a coalition of enemies consisting of the 'crusaders and Jews', the regimes in the Muslim world and 'their' *ulama*, the latter two of which are separated from the *umma* by framing them as 'apostates' and 'hypocrites'. In the videos, these enemies are predominantly talked *about*. They are typically referred to in the third person, in phrases such as: 'We are ruled today by apostate tyrants who are governing the countries by other than God's laws.'[43] Yet, as this quotation already indicates by speaking about 'we', the situation of the *umma* is different. The *umma* is the central protagonist in the conflict envisioned by al-Sahab, and the enemy alliance is the adversary of both the *umma* and the jihadist movement. Hence, in the context of the global conflict, al-Sahab, and therefore the jihadist movement, identifies with the *umma*. This is illustrated by the fact that *umma* is often addressed in the first person plural, for instance by speaking about 'our *umma*', 'our honour', 'our religion' and 'our God'.[44] In other contexts, however, the *umma* is excluded from the own group. This is often the case in al-Sahab's accounts of the state of the *umma* and in addresses in which the Muslims are criticised for neglecting the obligation of jihad. In one of the videos, for instance, the Muslims are warned that 'by staying at home you are turning your backs on jihad, which is a major sin.'[45]

By both identifying with and distinguishing itself from the *umma* al-Sahab is able to place the jihadist movement in the (alleged) unique position as the *umma*'s forefront. According to the videos, the regimes in the Muslim world have betrayed their people, the *ulama* cannot be trusted, *da'wa* movements and Islamists are

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[43] Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Heroes*, 29".

[44] See, for example, al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 53". It is significant to note, however, that it is al-Sahab that defines what the *umma* comprises. In some instances, it does so rather explicitly, for instance when al-Zawahiri states: 'To be a Sunni means that you be observant of the rules of Islam, the rule of the sharia and jihad against the enemies of Islam, the foreign invaders and the domestic agents' (*Wills of the Knights: Khan*, 23"). In this passage, al-Zawahiri defines what comprises Sunni Islam: a definition that excludes not only the 'domestic agents', i.e. the apostate regimes, but also the people who do not follow his interpretation of the Islamic law and, hence, do not wage jihad. By thus appropriating the *umma*, al-Zawahiri participates in the negotiations and contests about defining Islam, and attempts to reconstruct it in such a way that his audience is convinced that Islam implies waging jihad.

[45] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Khan*, 23".

following the wrong method and other Muslims are looking the other way while their brothers and sisters are humiliated. Jihadists, in contrast, stand up for the Islamic community. They revenged the death of Muhammad al-Durrah, the prisoner abuse in Afghanistan, the murderers of innocents by bombardments and the insulting of the Prophet, al-Sahab emphasises.[46] The jihadists have come from all corners of the world 'to stand as one, to fight the Jews and crusaders occupying their lands and to avenge their brothers whose blood was considered lawful in Palestine, Iraq and other Muslim countries.'[47] Hence, al-Sahab indicates by appropriating Qutb's idiom, the jihadist movement comprises the *umma*'s vanguard (*tali'a*). By thus representing the jihadist movement, al-Sahab on the one hand connects jihadism with its viewers by presenting it as part of the *umma*, and on the other hand offers them an empowering role as the *umma*'s defenders.

The appeal of this role is further increased by presenting jihadists as the vanguard of the *umma* in the footsteps of Muhammad and his companions, as we have seen throughout the book. This role is emphasised in statements, but also visually, for instance by supporting a statement of Bin Laden about the *hijra* of the Prophet with a staged scene in which a group of jihadists is walking on a desolate mountainside as if they were re-enacting the Prophet's migration.[48] Hence, the video suggests, just as the *salaf*, jihadists have sacrificed their possessions and positions to defend the *umma* against oppression. They 'spend their nights awake and their days thirsty until they succeed in being in the company of the Lord of the Worlds.' They comprise a 'storm of rare sacrifices' and 'examples of courage and defiance', who are living a life including 'honour, dignity, manliness and the companions of God.'[49] Visuals of training footage regularly underscore claims like these, often accompanied by victorious *nashids* in which the jihadists are celebrated as 'followers of a timeless generation' whose 'glory is reflected in their eyes.'[50] According to al-Sahab's empowering portrayal of jihadism, its participants are the 'soldiers of God' (*jund Allah*): the current representatives of the timeless community of pure believers that will eventually gain victory over evil.

Nevertheless, the jihadist movement is not represented as detached and supercilious. Home video-like recordings of men cutting wood, making fire and preparing their meals depict the 'soldiers of God' as ordinary men.[51] They are a brotherhood of comrades, it is suggested, for instance in scenes showing men singing together, or in footage of men saying farewell to their peers before an operation.[52] Scenes like these make the jihadist movement approachable for their viewers,

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[46] Especially the case of Muhammad al-Durrah is remarkable in this respect. In *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 33", the attack on the USS Cole is presented as 'an earth-shaking retaliation' for al-Durrah's death, which took place two months earlier.

[47] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 1*, 19".

[48] Al-Sahab, *Destruction of the USS Cole: Part 1*, 45-46".

[49] Al-Sahab, *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, 10"; *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 36"; *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, 27" and 49".

[50] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 11-15".

[51] Cf. Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon*, 35-40".

[52] Al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, for instance, includes several scenes of men singing together. For farewell scenes, see *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 78-7946"; *Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, 42"; *The Word is the Word of the Swords*, 53". See also scenes in which men express their sorrow over the loss of a brother, for instance in *Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, 6".

suggesting that they will be welcomed by a new community once they have become touched by the fate of the *umma* and are willing to abandon their old lives to join the *umma*'s vanguard.

9.3.2 The zenith of jihadism

Al-Sahab's representation of the jihadist movement as the unified, powerful and honorific defenders of the *umma* finds its summit in 'martyrdom operations'. In the videos, suicide attacks are deeply anchored within the jihadist movement. Al-Sahab closely entangles the two, as can be illustrated by having a closer look at one of the martyrdom videos: *Jihad and Martyrdom*, featuring the Egyptian commander Abu al-Hasan, who performed a suicide attack in Afghanistan (see also Ch. 8.4).[53] In the video, 'one of the most beautiful releases of al-Sahab yet', according to the comments on the forums on which it was released on 8 July 2008, Abu al-Hasan is depicted as a 'martyr' from its onset.[54] His very first words in the video, for instance, consist of a recitation of *sura* 9:111, in which the garden is promised to those who are slain in the way of God. Subsequently, the life story of the Egyptian commander is narrated by a voice-over, the commander himself and three al-Qaeda leaders who had known him personally. His biography as narrated by al-Sahab runs remarkably parallel to the history of al-Qaeda. According to the video, Abu al-Hasan joined the movement during the fights against the Russians in Afghanistan around the time that al-Qaeda was established there. In the early 1990s, the video continues, Abu al-Hasan moved with the al-Qaeda leadership to Sudan, from where he played a role in the fights against the Americans in Somalia in 1993, as well as in the bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam in 1998. After that, he travelled back to Afghanistan with Bin Laden, where he set up the al-Faruq training camp: the place where some of the 9/11 hijackers were trained. Finally, after the American invasion of Afghanistan, he took part in the fights against the U.S.-led coalition forces, first on the battlefield and thereafter in guerrilla warfare in the mountains. In short, according to the video, Abu al-Hasan played a leading role in al-Qaeda's major fights and attacks.

This narrative could be considered a means to enhance the status of the Egyptian commander: he has dedicated his entire life to the good cause and has become a prominent leader in the *umma*'s vanguard. It could also be argued, though, that the story of this man grants authority and credibility to the representation of al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement in the video. Because of the parallels between his life and the history of al-Qaeda, the narration of his life course provides plenty of opportunities to dwell on the movement and its activities, motivations and ideologies. Indeed, the editors of the video have fully grasped these opportunities. For example, the commander's stay in Sudan is used to expand on the American expulsion from Somalia in 1993 as well as on the 1998 embassy attacks, and his (second) stay in Afghanistan is used to elaborate on Bin Laden's activities there. This

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[53] Cf. Pieter Nanninga, 'The Words of the Martyr: Media, Martyrdom and the Construction of a Community', in Ernst van den Hemel and Asja Szafraniec (eds.), *Words: Situating Religion in Language* (New York, forthcoming).

[54] On this date, the video was available on, among others, www.alboraq.info; www.al-faloja.info; www.al-yemen.org; http://clearinghouse.infovlad.net and www.mu7ahideen.wordpress.com.

pattern is constantly repeated throughout the middle part of the video, to such an extent that more than half of it deals with the general history of al-Qaeda and jihadism instead of with Abu al-Hasan. Even more interesting is the fact that it is mainly Abu al-Hasan who narrates about the jihadist movement, whereas his life story is predominantly presented by his three colleagues.[55] Hence, al-Sahab has chosen to represent the jihadist movement not so much by its leaders, as could be expected, but rather by the man who had sacrificed his life for its cause.

The video *Jihad and Martyrdom* thus indicates that the suicide bombers are used to representing the jihadist movement, which adds to the authority of al-Sahab's message. Al-Sahab's depiction of jihadist life as a life of 'honour, dignity and manliness' (Ch. 9.3.1) is expressed by Abu al-Hasan, a man who performed the most honourable act possible: sacrificing himself for the humiliated *umma*. Along these lines, the suicide bombers and their actions become powerful witnesses (*shuhada*) of jihadism. In al-Sahab's videos, they are represented as the supreme manifestation of jihadist narratives, symbols, values, beliefs and practices: as the ultimate expressions of jihadists' struggle for the *umma*, the honour and dignity of their efforts and the power of their fights. The 'martyrs' have demonstrated their sacrifice not only by abandoning their families, it is suggested, but also by offering their lives. They have expressed their loyalty not merely by defending the *umma*, but by dying for it, and they have achieved success not only by killing the enemies, but by gaining 'the supreme triumph'. Hence, as 'Azzam labelled jihad the 'zenith of Islam', al-Sahab constructs 'martyrdom operations' into what could be called the 'zenith of jihadism'. The suicide bombers and their attacks embody jihadism as such, and can therefore be seen as both celebrations and (re)constructions of the jihadist movement.

9.3.3 Defining jihadism

In addition to representing the core narratives, symbols, values, beliefs and practices of the jihadist movement, the suicide bombers also (re)construct its boundaries in al-Sahab's videos. As observed before (Ch. 8.5), al-Sahab associates suicide attacks with, among others, loyalty, renunciation, self-sacrifice, honour, dignity, courage, power and purity. When comparing these virtues with the characteristics of the U.S.-led alliance as discussed in chapter 7, we can see that both are strongly opposed.

To briefly recapitulate, the 'crusaders and Jews' are typified as 'infidels' who are focused on 'this world', the *dunya*. They lack an ideology and are solely characterised by self-interest and material gain. Hence, their rhetoric about democracy, human rights and freedom of speech is hollow: in practice, they are just as oppressive and immoral as the Egyptian Pharaoh. Moreover, their attachment to life and fear of death makes them inherently weak, as a result of which their military and political superiority is only an illusion. The contrast with al-Sahab's representation of the suicide bombers could not be more striking. The infidelity (*kufr*) of the enemies is opposed to the 'pure faith (*iman*)' and 'creed' (*'aqida*) of the suicide bombers.

[55] This is indicated by a content analysis of the middle part of the video (25:28 minutes in total), which is for 34% presented by Abu al-Hasan, 31% by the narrator, 24% by his three colleagues and 11% by others. Whereas Abu al-Hasan speaks for 62% of the time about al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement and, accordingly, for only 38% about his own life, his colleagues talk for 79% about Abu al-Hasan, and only for 21% about the jihad in general.

Moreover, the bombers are not attached to earth, but focused on the *akhira* instead of the *dunya*, longing for martyrdom in the way of God. This eagerness to sacrifice their worldly existence for the sake of the oppressed makes them highly motivated in battle, and will bring them victory in the end.

In many cases, this contrast is expressed explicitly, in typical phrases such as 'we love death the way you love life' and 'their paradise is the *dunya*, while our paradise is the *akhira*.'[56] In other instances, the contrast is left more implicit. One video, for instance, exemplifies the Americans' fear of death and, therefore, inherent weakness by means of an interview with an American Somalia veteran. After recapitulating his experiences from the front he breaks down in tears – a striking contrast with the heroic portrayal of the suicide bombers.[57] As these examples illustrate, the suicide bombers and, hence, the jihadist movement, comprise a reversed mirror of the *umma*'s main enemy.

A comparable pattern is discernible with regard to al-Sahab's depiction of the regimes in the Muslim world and 'their' *ulama*. According to al-Sahab, both the regimes and scholars pretend to be Muslims, yet are, in fact, betraying their religion. They are disloyal to the faithful and ally themselves with the 'infidels', which makes them comparable to the Quranic hypocrites, and therefore apostates. Just as their Western 'protectors', they are attached to earthly life and ruled by selfishness, living their lives in luxury and extravagancy and doing their utmost to maintain their wealth and positions. Again, the difference with the suicide bombers is evident. The bombers are the followers of the Prophet and his companions and they have demonstrated their willingness to give up their earthly pleasures to live a life in modesty. They have even showed their preparedness to sacrifice their earthly existence in order to express their loyalty to God and their oppressed fellow Muslims.

The contrast between the two is often depicted rather subtly, for instance in scenes in which Arab leaders welcome their Western or Israeli counterparts in their richly decorated palaces, which markedly contrasts with the simple and humble portrayal of suicide bombers who are narrating their sacrifices for the oppressed Muslims. In other instances, the opposition is expressed more bluntly. Bin Laden, for example, eulogises the 9/11 bombers by saying:

> There is a huge difference between the path of the kings, presidents and hypocritical *ulama* and the path of these noble young men. The former's fate is to spoil and enjoy themselves, whereas the latter's fate is to destroy themselves to make God's word supreme. Thus, the former's path is hurrying to please the *kuffar*, whereas the latter's path is hurrying to please the Strong and Forgiving.[58]

As statements like these show, the regimes and scholars too, are negatively mirrored by the suicide bombers and their actions.

Finally, the same contrast is true regarding the Muslims who are too connected to earthly life to make sacrifices for their religion. Their slumbering has resulted in a state of weakness, humiliation, disgrace and defilement – a state that, as we

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[56] Cf. Al-Sahab, *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari*, 24-25"; *Wills of the Knights: Tanweer*, 7".
[57] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 18-20".
[58] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Martyrs: al-Shehri*, 12-13".

witnessed before (Ch. 8.5), sharply contrasts with the strength, honour, dignity and purity that is embodied by suicide bombers and their attacks. Again, the difference is repeatedly highlighted by al-Sahab, for instance by saying that 'in an age when hearts are satisfied with the *dunya* and its blessings, fond of its paraphernalia and deceived by its apparent splendour and glittering, some lively ones saw the raised banners of jihad, listened to the call, and began their march [towards martyrdom].'[59] In contrast with the *umma*'s slumber, the suicide bombers are called 'sleepless', showing the world that 'in this *umma* there are men who do not sleep under oppression, but sacrifice everything precious and dear to lift their *umma* from the humiliation and weakness it is experiencing.'[60]

Al-Sahab thus constructs sharp distinctions between the suicide bombers and both the *umma* and its enemies by means of reverse mirror imaging. Moreover, since suicide bombers and their operations are presented as the zenith of jihadism, these distinctions, by extension, also represent the distinctions between jihadism and these 'others'. In other words, in al-Sahab's videos, the suicide bombers and their attacks become expressions and (re)constructions of the boundaries of the jihadist movement. They symbolise the difference between jihadists' faith and the crusaders infidelity, between jihadists' loyalty and the apostates' betrayal and between jihadists' honourable sacrifice and the *umma*'s disgraceful slumber. This makes the suicide bombers living definitions of the jihadist movement.

9.4 Offering empowerment

We have seen so far that al-Sahab's martyrdom videos aim at creating a compelling call to the Muslim youths to rise in defence of their religion by embracing jihad and martyrdom. They do so by facilitating the audience's identification with the *umma* and, hence, its humiliation, by providing alternative authorities in the shape of appealing leaders and role models, and by offering them an empowering role as participants in the *umma*'s vanguard. Yet it is important to emphasise in the last section of this chapter that al-Sahab's efforts to mobilise its audience do not only involve balanced, rational arguments about the value of the jihadist movement and its struggle. To grasp the power of the martyrdom videos, it is crucial to realise that they also make an emotional appeal to the viewers.

The emotional charge of al-Sahab's message is partially caused by dozens of touching scenes that depict the suffering caused by the perceived conflict between the *umma* and its enemies. More interesting for our purpose at this stage are the evocative pictures that the videos paint of the suicide bombers and their actions. By sophisticatedly combining brief statements, powerful footage, poignant recitations, emotional songs and haunting animations al-Sahab aims at creating a mesmerising image of young men battling the *umma*'s oppressors.

The introduction of the London bomber Mohammed Sidique Khan in his martyrdom video provides a good case in point. The video starts with a statement by al-Zawahiri in which he discusses the London bombings and their targets, after which he announces Khan's farewell message. Subsequently, a catching *nashid*

[59] Al-Sahab, *Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, 5-6".
[60] Al-Sahab, *Jihad and Martyrdom*, 30".

entitled '*ya shahid*' ('Oh martyr') fades in and a banner appears, which reads: 'The martyr Mohammed Sidique Khan: one of the knights (*fursan*) of the blessed London raid (*ghazwa*).' Simultaneously, a picture of the bomber becomes visible, which is superimposed on footage showing several horsemen riding through the desert.[61] When Khan subsequently starts his farewell message, the stage has been set. He is verbally as well as visually introduced as a *fursan*, a term meaning 'knight' but originally denoting a horseman.[62] His action is introduced as a *ghazwa*, a term we have encountered before (Ch. 6.3.3) as referring to the 'raids' of Muhammad. Both terms and the iconographical symbol of horsemen in the desert are reminiscent of the battles fought by the *salaf*. Together they introduce the 'martyr' as a heroic successor of the Prophet and his companions, who pursues their efforts against unbelief.[63]

Equally evocative is the closure of Abu Gharib al-Makki's martyrdom video.[64] The sound of the last scene, which comprises a few minutes, is dominated by an *adhan* (call to prayer) which is performed by the bomber himself. During the *adhan*, a voice-over compares the bomber to Muhammad ibn Maslamah, a companion of the Prophet who avenged an insult of the Prophet – just as Abu Gharib al-Makki did with his attack against the Danish Embassy in Islamabad.[65] Emotional footage shows the suicide bomber saying farewell to his friends, while in the background a picture of a sunrise in a mountainous landscape is blended with an image of the Masjid al-Haram during the *hajj*. Like Khan's martyrdom video, this scene combines symbols referring to the pious predecessors and martyrdom, to which it adds central symbols of the *umma*: the Ka'ba, the *salat* and the *hajj*. In concert, these elements present Khan as a heroic champion of the pure Islam of the Prophet who stood up in defence of the *umma*.

The emotional load of martyrdom becomes even more evident from al-Sahab's depiction of the suicide attacks themselves. By supporting footage and animations of the violence with Quran recitations, *nashids* and poetry, the attacks are portrayed as signs of the upcoming victory. Footage of the collapsing World Trade Center, for example, is accompanied by Quran quotations of *sura* 2:117, which says that 'when He decrees something, He only has to say "be", and it is.'[66] Thus, it is suggested, the collapse of the towers was God's will.

Probably even more important than Quran recitations are *nashids*. In the videos, these a capella songs, which have a characteristic melody and often an emotional tone, usually deal with the themes of jihad and martyrdom and are mainly employed when portraying the attacks during the climax of the video. The video *The Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, for example, concentrates on a suicide attack on the

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[61] Al-Sahab, *Wills of the Knights: Khan*, 18-19".

[62] Cf. 'Fāris', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden 2010) at www.referenceworks.brillonline.com, last accessed September 2013.

[63] Footage of horsemen frequently return in the context of suicide missions. See, for example, al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon*, 6", 8" and 18".

[64] Al-Sahab, *The Word Is the Word of the Swords*, 52-53".

[65] According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad ibn Maslamah killed Ka'b, the chief of a Jewish tribe in Medina, because he had written poems that were perceived offensive against the Prophet. According to the video, Abu Gharib al-Makki's attack on the Danish embassy likewise revenged an offence against the Prophet: the *Jyllands Posten* cartoons.

[66] Al-Sahab, *The Wills of the Heroes*, 39".

American consulate in Karachi, Pakistan, in 2006. After having dealt with the motivations, backgrounds, perpetrator and target of the attack for more than 75 minutes, a *nashid* fades in to support footage of the bomber's last moments on earth. While the catchy song says 'We are the army of God, which desires death', the 'martyr' is depicted while praying and preparing his bomb car. Then, a second, even more emotional *nashid* starts, saying: 'Accept from me my last farewells; As I proceed for a martyr's raid; From which I may not return (...); I am going to meet my Lord.' Meanwhile, the young man is shown, smiling and embracing his comrades, entering his car and driving away.[67]

The video *Knowledge is for Acting upon*, to provide a final example, comprises a jihadist documentary focusing on the 9/11 attacks and includes the testaments of two of the Saudi hijackers. In the course of the video, *nashids* are used several times to support footage of jihadists training in the Afghan training camps. Yet the closure of the video is a particularly powerful combination of sounds and visuals. After almost one and a half hours, Bin Laden concludes the account by telling his audience in one of the Afghan training camps that al-Qaeda is about to perform an operation that will have a profound impact on their situation in Afghanistan. At that very moment, one of the most well-known and celebrated jihadist *nashids* fades in. While *al-Qawl Qawl al-Sawarim* ('The Word is the Word of the Swords') is heard, dozens of video fragments of the World Trade Center are shown as it is being hit by the two planes and, eventually, collapses.[68] Together, the three minutes closing the video provide a powerful tribute to the 'martyrdom operation' and its perpetrators: 'A generation coming with the dawn', according to the *nashid*, who 'destroyed a head of aggression.'[69]

These examples once again indicate that suicide attacks are portrayed as the zenith of jihadism. They express jihadists' unique position as the *umma*'s vanguard that will offer their community a way out of the darkness. They are the heralds of the dawn, the embodiment of the promise that 'God is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light' (Q. 2:257).

9.5 Conclusion

In chapter 4, we discussed the case of the Yemeni jihadist Nasir al-Bahri, who indicated that he, while living in Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, had become touched by the 'slaughtering of Muslims' in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kuwait and Palestine. He was influenced by jihadist media, he stated, which made him realise that it was the *umma* that was at stake, the nation that once had a distinguished place among the nations. He wished that he was one of these mujahidun defending the Muslims lands, he indicated, and thus he joined the emerging jihadist movement in Afghanistan to 'defend the honour of Muslims'.

In this chapter, we have seen that al-Sahab's martyrdom videos exactly aim at accomplishing what happened to al-Bahri. The martyrdom videos are designed for

[67] Al-Sahab, *Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, 1:17-1:20".
[68] The popularity of this *nashid* can be witnessed on YouTube, where the different versions have more than half a million of views at the moment (last accessed November 2013).
[69] Al-Sahab, *Knowledge is for Acting upon: Part 2*, 33-36".

young men like him, who have become affected by the fate of their fellow Muslims and 'become religiously committed', as al-Bahri phrased it. The martyrdom videos facilitate feelings of humiliation by proxy like these, and subsequently reframe the different conflict areas as part of the global struggle between the *umma* and its opponents. They invite people like al-Bahri to embrace new authorities who are trustworthy and experienced, and to follow the examples of the young men featured in the videos: ordinary Muslims who also became touched by their co-religionists and then joined the jihadist movement. The videos invite people like al-Bahri to join the men who stand up for their *umma* in the footsteps of the *salaf*, who defend its honour and will be victorious in the end.

However, in comparison to the time of al-Bahri, al-Sahab's videos have one extra tool at their disposal: suicide attacks. As we have argued in the second part of this chapter, suicide attacks are represented as the 'zenith of jihadism': the ultimate expression of what the jihadist movement is about. The suicide bombers do not only embody some of the central narratives, symbols, values, beliefs and practices of the jihadist movement, they also express and produce its boundaries. As the *umma*'s enemies represent unbelief, hypocrisy, attachment to life and fear of death, and as the *umma* itself is characterised by humiliation, disgrace, weakness and darkness, the 'martyrs' and their acts of self-sacrifice represent the opposite. Hence, they are more than mere role models for men such as al-Bahri: they are the living definitions of the jihadist movement itself.

Conclusion

This study aims at elucidating the central role of suicide attacks in the jihadist movement by arguing that suicide attacks, as a symbolic form of violence, are crucial for jihadists to construct their movement: they publicise jihadism and are therefore essential to attract, bind and mobilise support.

Jihadism is a distinctly modern phenomenon. Since its emergence during the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, it has evolved into a dynamic, diverse and decentralised movement centring on the idea of waging a global jihad against the alleged occupiers of the Muslim lands. Like many Western new social movements, its organisational structure is anti-hierarchic and fragmented, and its participants diverse regarding their socioeconomic, national, political, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Jihadist thought both reflects and produces the heterogeneity of the movement's participants. Jihadists have anchored their ideology in (perceived) authentic Muslim traditions by claiming to follow the pure Islam of the 'pious predecessors' and by appropriating concepts such as *tawhid*, jihad and *istishhad*. They have applied these concepts in markedly modern ways and blended them with elements from non-Sunni as well as non-Muslim traditions. The result is a hybrid and dynamic ideology that is distinctly globalised, deterritorialised and individualised, which nevertheless easily blends with local customs and traditions. By claiming and being perceived to be genuinely Islamic, yet at the same time being adapted to modern, local and global contexts, the jihadist message can be attractive for people with divergent backgrounds.

Although jihadists have largely lacked the opportunities and resources to bring this message to the fore, they could profit from the opportunities that were provided by, among others, the wars in Afghanistan (1979-1989 and since 2001) and Iraq (since 2003) as well as the Taliban regime (1996-2001). Moreover, pioneered by al-Qaeda and its media group al-Sahab, jihadists have creatively used media technologies to construct a new, transnational public for whom jihadism provides an attractive alternative. Yet, as this study argues, it is particularly suicide attacks that have enabled jihadists to publicise jihadist thought and practice.

Focusing on al-Qaeda, this study has shown that suicide attacks have provided an important means to draw attention to its cause. Al-Qaeda's attacks were orchestrated as 'theatres of violence' that signalled powerful messages to its (potential) supporters, giving them insights into the nature of the jihadist movement and its perceived enemies. As the attacks publicised jihadism, al-Sahab's releases, which drew a huge audience due to the attacks, enabled al-Qaeda to elaborate on the messages signalled by the violence. Besides, by developing the traditional genre of farewell messages into extensive documentary-like productions, al-Sahab also provided al-Qaeda with the opportunity to portray its views on the state of the *umma* and the jihadist movement. Hence, al-Qaeda could publicise its message of a global conflict between the *umma* and an alliance of enemies consisting of 'crusaders and Jews', 'apostate regimes' in the Muslim world and 'scholars of the palace'. Because Muslims have neglected God's commands and are too much attached to earthly life, these enemies have gained the upper hand, the narrative proceeds, as a result of which the *umma* has become characterised by weakness, humiliation, oppression,

defilement and darkness. But there is a way out of the current situation, al-Qaeda claims: the path of migration, preparation, *ribat*, jihad and, ultimately, 'martyrdom operations' – the path of the jihadist movement.

The message sent by the violence and martyrdom videos together can be appealing for the Muslim youths al-Qaeda aims at. It incorporates different conflicts as well as several issues of shared concern in the Muslim world, and therefore aligns with the experiences of its audience. Concurrently, it reframes the audience's concerns in global and religious terms, which facilitates its identification with fellow Muslims and may invigorate feelings of humiliation (by proxy). By subsequently presenting jihadists as the sole defenders of the embattled *umma*, it offers young Muslims throughout the world the opportunity to assist their 'brothers and sisters' in need. Moreover, it offers them an empowering role as members of the *umma*'s vanguard that defends Islam in the footsteps of the Prophet and his companions. Just like the *salaf*, the 'Muslim youths' can revive the glory of Islam in this world, it is suggested, and by following the model of the Prophet they will be victorious in the end. Al-Qaeda's message, in short, offers young people from different regions in the world a way to give meaning to their lives that is experienced as authentically Islamic, but at the same time thoroughly modern, and therefore both empowering and fitting their needs and experiences.

The combined use of suicide attacks and martyrdom videos has thus provided a significant means for al-Qaeda to reach its (potential) supporters and convince them of the value of the global jihad. Yet this study has also shown that the importance of suicide attacks in the jihadist movement cannot be fully comprehended without paying attention to the social meanings of the violence for the actors involved. Suicide attacks appeared to be meaningful social practices that express what jihadism is about. Both the ritualised form of the violence and the meanings given to the attacks in the martyrdom videos have provided us with significant insights in this respect, some of which have been hardly addressed in current literature on the topic.

The form of the violent practices, as well as al-Sahab's representation thereof, indicate that jihadist suicide attacks should not be conceived as actions that are primarily aimed at achieving success on the battlefield. Rather, they express the perception that jihadists in general and 'martyrs' in particular are following the pure Islam of the prophet Muhammad and his companions. The ritualised preparations for and execution of the attacks repeatedly associate the violence with early Islamic martyrdom traditions, and the videos frequently compare the actions with the Prophet and his companions' longing or even actively searching for martyrdom. These references are made not in the first place to legitimise the innovative practice, but rather show that, from the perspective of jihadists, suicide attacks are religious practices: ritualised acts of worship through which the perpetrators re-enact the battles fought by Muhammad. Just as their seventh-century predecessors, jihadist 'martyrs' are prepared to sacrifice their earthly existence in the struggle for God, Islam and the *umma*, for which they will be rewarded with the 'supreme triumph'.

In addition to ideas about martyrdom and the following of the Prophet and his companions, terms such as loyalty, honour, dignity, sacrifice and purity also occupy a central place in both the ritualised form of the violence and the martyrdom videos. These virtues together express the idea that, through their self-sacrifice, the suicide bombers restore the stained honour and dignity of their community and purify its

desecrated lands. In the eyes of the perpetrators, the attacks undo the *umma*'s weakness and avenge the blood that has been spilled. Therefore, the attacks embody the *umma*'s victory – not so much on the battlefield, but rather in terms of purification, restored honour and regained dignity.

From this perspective, jihadist suicide attacks show themselves as performances of jihadism itself. They are the ultimate expressions of some of its central symbols, narratives, values, beliefs and practices, and therefore demarcate the jihadist movement from the *umma* and its enemies. By highlighting the power, dignity, courage, piety, loyalty and self-sacrifice of jihadists, the attacks underline the contrast with the weakness, humiliation and lethargy of the *umma* and the unbelief, betrayal and attachment to life of its enemies. By thus expressing the boundaries of the jihadist movement, the 'martyrs' become living definitions of jihadism.

Their attacks tell the story of the jihadist movement: a story that can attract, bind and mobilise support. The story they express attracts Muslim youths from different places and with different backgrounds who have become affected by the suffering of their fellow believers and therefore eager to join the sole defenders of their 'brothers and sisters'. The story binds the participants of the movement by leaving space for diversity, while creating a sense of solidarity around the perception that they are the perceived successors of the Prophet in the current episode of the timeless battle against evil. The story, finally, mobilises jihadists by empowering them with the idea that they personally can restore the *umma*'s honour and purify its lands, and thus bring about the supreme triumph. The suicide attacks, in short, are not merely expressions of the jihadist movement, they also play a crucial role in its construction.

These insights shed new light on the phenomena of jihadism and suicide attacks as well as on the relation between the two. The strategy not to approach jihadism as a rigid and clearly demarcated movement has enabled us to recognise the hybridity and flexibility of jihadist thought. This has facilitated us to better comprehend the possible attractiveness of the jihadist message to people from divergent backgrounds in different regions of the world. By approaching suicide attacks from the perspective of the actors involved, this study has shown that this expressive form of violence publicises the potentially attractive jihadist message, and therefore plays a crucial role in shaping the jihadist movement. Thus, also when primarily aiming at providing policy and security advice, much can be gained by studying the meanings of the violence for its participants in their specific contexts.

This study, in short, not only contributes to a better understanding of the attraction of al-Qaeda to people throughout the world, it also enables us to better understand why some young men and women in the Western world are attracted to jihadist struggles in countries such as Syria. In these cases too, it is important to scrutinise their cultural backgrounds, social networks, psychological profiles and religious views. Yet without recognising the jihad's intimate connection to themes such as loyalty, honour, dignity and empowerment, we cannot begin to grasp the motivations of these young people to leave their families to fight in a place where they have never been, nor their eagerness to sacrifice their lives among people whom they have never met.

Appendix I: Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos

	Release	**Attack(s)**
1a	*The Destruction of the American Destroyer USS Cole: Part 1*, 2001, 55 mins.	USS Cole, Aden, Yemen (12-10-'00)
1b	*The Destruction of the American Destroyer USS Cole: Part 2*, 2001, 52 mins.	USS Cole, Aden, Yemen (12-10-'00)
2	*The Wills of the Martyrs of the Raids on New York and Washington: Ahmad al-Haznawi*, Apr. 2002, 64 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)
3	*The Nineteen Martyrs: 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Umari*, Sep. 2002, 64 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)
4	*American Hell in Afghanistan and Iraq: Sa'id al-Ghamdi*, Sep. 2003, 45 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)
5	*The Wills of the Heroes: the Martyrs of the Two Holy Places*, Oct. 2003, 45 mins.	Riyadh Compound, Saudi Arabia (12-5-'03)
6a	*Badr al-Riyadh: Part 1*, Feb. 2004, 48 mins.	Muhaya Compound, Saudi Arabia (8-11-'03)
6b	Badr al-Riyadh: Part 2, Feb. 2004, 44 mins.	Muhaya Compound, Saudi Arabia (8-11-'03)
7	*The Wills of the Knights of the London Raid: Mohammed Sidique Khan*, Sep. 2005, 27 mins.	London Bombings, UK (7-7-'05)
8	*The Wills of the Knights of the London Raid: Shehzad Tanweer*, Jul. 2006, 31 mins.	London Bombings, UK (7-7-'05)
9a	*Knowledge is for Acting upon: The Manhattan Raid: Part 1*, Sep. 2006, 55 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)
9b	*Knowledge is for Acting upon: The Manhattan Raid: Part 2*, Sep. 2006, 36 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)
10	*Winds of Paradise: Part 1*, Jul. 2007, 40 mins.	Several, Afghanistan
11	*The Will of the Martyr Hafiz Usman*, Aug. 2007, 81 mins.	U.S. Consulate, Pakistan (2-3-'06)
12	*The Wills of the Martyrs of the Raids on New York and Washington: Walid al-Shehri*, Sep. 2007, 47 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)
13	*The Power of Truth*, Sep. 2007, 81 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)
14	*Winds of Paradise: Part 2*, Jan. 2008, 46 mins.	Several, Afghanistan
15	*Jihad and Martyrdom: Commander Abu al-Hasan*, Jul. 2008, 46 mins.	Unknown, probably Afghanistan
16	*The Word is the Word of the Swords: the Raid of the Muezzin, Abu Gharib al-Makki*, Sep. 2008, 54 mins.	Danish Embassy, Pakistan (2-6-'08)
17	*The Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, Sep. 2008, 87 mins.	9/11, USA (11-9-'01)

The martyrdom videos listed above all comprise extensive, documentary-like productions about one or more suicide bombers and/or attacks.[1] These videos have constituted the main source for my research. Jihadist writings, forums and other audio and video releases have been used as supplementary sources (see also Appendix II).[2]

Five reasons underlie my decision to focus on videos that have been released until late 2008. First, in September 2008, around the seventh anniversary of 9/11, major changes took place on jihadist internet forums. Probably because al-Sahab used to celebrate 9/11 anniversaries with new martyrdom videos, many jihadist sites were attacked around that date, and subsequently disappeared.[3] Although alternative sites returned, key forums such as al-Ekhlaas disappeared. Al-Sahab's relationship with the key forums changed and jihadist infrastructure was severely damaged.[4] Second, since late 2008, the quantity of al-Sahab's releases as well as their production quality has decreased, and would never again reach the level of the years before. Gradually, al-Sahab had to share its leading role in the jihadists' virtual world with other media producers.[5] Third, the support for jihadism in general seemed to decline in large parts of the Muslim world in the same period (see Ch. 3.1.2).[6] Fourth,

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[1] Fifteen of these videos include suicide bombers' farewell messages. Only *Destruction of the USS Cole* and *The Power of Truth* do not directly include suicide bombers' farewell messages. These videos concentrate on the suicide attack on the American Destroyer USS Cole and the 9/11 attacks, respectively. They have been crucial to the development of the genre of martyrdom videos and are among the most influential of al-Sahab's releases. *The Winds of Paradise* series, which was started in 2007, features both 'ordinary' martyrs as well as 'martyrdom seekers'. Because of the huge impact of this series, these too, have been incorporated in the corpus.

[2] This also counts for al-Sahab's martyrdom videos in which Arabic or English is not the primary language. See, for example, al-Sahab, *Protectors of the Sanctuary 1: the Martyr Muhammad Afdal* (December 2007); Idem, *A True Imam* (September 2008), both available at www.archive.org, last accessed April 2014.

[3] Since 9/11, al-Sahab had always used the anniversary of the attacks to publish high-profile messages to celebrate the event. Between 2002 and 2007, it released audio or video statements by Bin Laden or al-Zawahiri or martyrdom videos featuring prominent suicide bombers on or around the 9/11 anniversary: in 2002 the martyrdom video *The Nineteen Martyrs: al-'Umari* and several statements, in 2003 the martyrdom video *American Hell: al-Ghamdi*, in 2004 an audio message by al-Zawahiri, in 2005 the will of the London bomber Mohammed Sidique Khan, in 2006 the video *Knowledge is for Acting* and in 2007 a statement of Bin Laden as well as 9/11 bomber Walid al-Shehri's video testament. To prevent al-Sahab from publishing a message on the seventh anniversary of 9/11, the major jihadist forums were attacked and hacked in the days before, causing the disappearance of, among others, al-Boraq, al-Ekhlaas and al-Firdaws. A discussion forum at www.ummah.com (last accessed April 2011), referring to a site of the 'Civilian Cyber Corps' (www.warintel11.wetpaint.com), even mentions about 230 sites that were targeted as part of this counter-terrorism operation. As a result, al-Sahab's release *Results of Seven Years of Crusades*, which was planned to be published on 11 September 2008, was delayed for almost a week and, more importantly, several of the most popular jihadist forums never returned.

[4] About al-Ekhlaas' (controversial) brief return in 2009, see Howard Altman, 'Al Qaeda's Web Revival', 2 October 2009, at www.thedailybeast.com, last accessed May 2013.

[5] Cf. Scott Stewart, 'The 9/11 Anniversary and What Didn't Happen', 16 September 2010, at www.stratfor.com, last accessed May 2013.

[6] Cf. Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 104-26.

the same trend is discernible in the support for suicide bombings. For instance, the percentages of Egyptians, Jordanians and Pakistanis who believed that suicide attacks are 'never justified' increased from 40 to 52, 41 to 56 and 81 to 87 per cent, respectively, between 2008 and 2009.[7] Hence, in addition to the difficulties experienced by jihadist media groups in general and al-Sahab in particular, the year 2008 marks a transition period for jihadism as well. Finally, not only the jihadist movement itself and its perception changed around this period: the same is true for the face of 'evil'. Barack Obama's election as the 44th President of the U.S. in November 2008 had important repercussions for (the perception of) symbolic policy issues such as the detention centre at Guantanamo Bay and the American-led war in Iraq.

[7] The Pew Global Attitudes Project, Question Database, 'Support for Suicide Bombing', 10 September 2009, at www.pewglobal.org, last accessed May 2013.

Appendix II: A Note on methodology

Al-Sahab's martyrdom videos have been collected from the Internet. Over the past years, I have monitored numerous websites and forums in both Arabic and English to collect the sources for this study. Most of these sites and forums were maintained by jihadists and their sympathisers,[1] but sites of their opponents,[2] research institutes and individual researchers[3] as well as Internet archives[4] have been checked regularly as well. Monitoring jihadist web pages often had a rather unstructured character. Due to actions by intelligence services and hackers, the sites and forums often disappeared and URLs changed frequently, while new sites were established in the meantime. Besides, the content of the sites appeared to be highly flexible and often modified. Therefore, I have archived those web pages as well as text, audio and video files that seemed relevant for my research, first in a somewhat unfocused fashion, but soon, once the focus on al-Sahab's martyrdom videos had been determined, in a more structured way.

After having collected the martyrdom videos that were released before 2009, I have transcribed and/or translated these sources, hereby also adding descriptions of their visuals. Subsequently, I have carried out a content analysis by dividing the videos in sequences and scenes and then coding them on different levels, varying from general themes (e.g. humiliation, jihad, martyrdom etc.) to specific terms or images (e.g. blood, green birds, Q. 9:5, etc.). The list of codes and their frequencies that were obtained in this way have offered insights into the central themes and important topics within the videos, and provided a useful tool for comparing related fragments in different videos. Subsequently, I have analysed the (combination of) text, sound and imagery by means of discourse analysis, in which I have paid particular attention to processes of 'selfing' and 'othering'.[5]

While doing so, I have constantly paid attention to the contexts of the sources. In the first place, this involved the online contexts of the videos: the jihadist websites, forums and clearinghouses on which the videos were released and discussed. Since this study primarily focuses on the producers of the videos, the ways in which the videos were released, distributed and branded by al-Sahab have been particularly relevant in this respect. In addition, I have contextualised the videos, their producers and protagonists in the offline world. Although there are some gaps in our knowledge about al-Sahab and some of the videos' protagonists, we

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[1] These websites and forums included al-Boraq, Ansar, Clearinghouse.infovlad, al-Ekhlaas, al-Faloja, al-Firdaws, Qal3ah, al-Sakifa, Tajdeed and Thabaat. Most of these sites and forums disappeared between 2007 and 2013.

[2] See, among others, www.counterterrorismblog.org (ended in March 2011); www.internet-haganah.com; last accessed March 2011); www.mypetjawa.mu.nu (last accessed May 2013).

[3] See, among others, www.intelcenter.com; www.ict.org.il; www.jamestown.org; www.jihadica.com; www.lauramansfield.com, last accessed May 2013.

[4] See, among others, www.archive.org (last accessed March 2014); www.jarchive.info (disappeared in 2009).

[5] The 'grammars' of 'selfing' and 'othering' as discussed in Baumann, 'Grammars of Identity/Alterity' have provided a useful tool in this respect.

are quite well-informed about al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement in which the media group is embedded. By studying al-Sahab's videos as part of these phenomena within their specific local as well as transnational contexts, this study has attempted to develop an understanding as complete as possible of these fascinating sources.

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Nederlandse samenvatting

Jihadisme en zelfmoordaanslagen: al-Qaeda, al-Sahab en de betekenissen van martelaarschap

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de centrale rol van zelfmoordaanslagen in de jihadistische beweging in de eenentwintigste eeuw. De voornaamste bronnen die het hiervoor gebruikt zijn martelarenvideo's: uitgebreide en vrij professionele films van jihadisten over 'martelaren' en hun aanslagen. Door de aanslagen van al-Qaeda (Centraal) en de video's van al-Qaeda's mediagroep al-Sahab te analyseren, betoogt deze studie dat zelfmoordaanslagen een cruciale rol spelen in het publiceren van het jihadistische gedachtegoed, en daarmee in het aantrekken, verbinden en mobiliseren van aanhangers van de jihadistische beweging.

Het jihadisme – in deze studie omschreven als de transnationale beweging die claimt een globale jihad te voeren tegen de (vermeende) bezetters van moslimgebieden – heeft zich sinds zijn opkomst tijdens de oorlog in Afghanistan in de jaren 1980 ontwikkeld tot een diffuse en gedecentraliseerde beweging. Evenals bij veel Westerse nieuwe sociale bewegingen is de organisatiestructuur van het jihadisme anti-hiërarchisch en gefragmenteerd, en zijn de deelnemers zeer divers wat betreft hun sociaaleconomische, nationale, politieke, etnische, culturele en religieuze achtergronden. Het jihadistische gedachtegoed is zowel een uitdrukking als aanjager van deze diversiteit. Jihadisten hebben hun gedachtegoed verankerd in als authentiek ervaren moslimtradities en claimen de pure islam van de profeet Mohammed en zijn metgezellen te volgen. Ze passen deze vroeg-islamitische tradities en concepten echter toe op een eigentijdse wijze en combineren deze met elementen uit niet-soennitische en zelfs niet-islamitische tradities. Het resultaat is een hybride en dynamische ideologie die sterk geglobaliseerd, gedeterritorialiseerd en geïndividualiseerd is, maar tegelijkertijd vermengd met lokale gebruiken en tradities. De combinatie van vermeende authenticiteit en inbedding in hedendaagse globale en lokale contexten maakt het jihadisme potentieel aantrekkelijk voor mensen met zeer uiteenlopende achtergronden.

Jihadisten hebben echter weinig mogelijkheden en middelen om deze boodschap over het voetlicht te brengen. Om die reden hebben ze sinds de jaren 1980 op creatieve en innovatieve wijze verschillende soorten media gebruikt, wat een belangrijke rol heeft gespeeld in de opkomst en ontwikkeling van de jihadistische beweging. Het is echter vooral het gezamenlijke gebruik van media en geweld geweest dat jihadistische leiders de gelegenheid heeft gegeven hun aanhangers te bereiken. De zelfmoordaanslagen van al-Qaeda en de martelarenvideo's al-Sahab hebben hierin een leidende rol gespeeld.

Al-Qaeda's leiders hebben het fenomeen zelfmoordaanslagen of, in hun termen, 'martelarenoperaties' in het midden van de jaren 1990 omarmd, en wisten vervolgens door middel van een aantal spectaculaire aanslagen de aandacht te vestigen op hun beweging en haar globale jihad. Door de geselecteerde doelen, tijdstippen en methoden van de aanslagen, verschaften ze (potentiele) jihadisten

bovendien inzicht in het karakter van de jihadistische beweging en haar vijanden. Al-Sahab's video's, die door de aanslagen een relatief groot publiek bereikten, stelden al-Qaeda's leiders vervolgens in staat het jihadisme en zijn gedachtegoed verder uit te dragen en te propageren. Door het traditionele genre van afscheidsvideo's verder te ontwikkelen tot het nieuwe genre van martelarenvideo's, maakten ze het zichzelf mogelijk om, aan de hand van de 'martelaren' en hun acties, de jihadistische beweging te presenteren als de oplossing voor de hachelijke situatie waarin de islamitische gemeenschap, de *umma*, zich op dit moment bevindt. Volgens de video's is er een globaal religieus conflict gaande tussen de *umma* en een alliantie van vijanden, bestaande uit 'kruisvaarders en zionisten', 'afvallige heersers' in de moslimwereld en traditionele islamgeleerden. Omdat de moslims gehecht zijn geraakt aan het aardse bestaan en daardoor zijn afgeweken van de pure islam van de profeet Mohammed, wordt de *umma* gekenmerkt door zwakte, aldus de video's. Hierdoor hebben de vijanden de overhand kunnen krijgen en is de huidige situatie van de *umma* er een van vernedering, onderdrukking en verontreiniging. Er is echter een uitweg uit deze situatie, zo geven de video's aan, namelijk door in actie te komen en de methode van de jihadisten te omarmen, die bestaat uit de fasen migratie, voorbereiding, *ribat*, jihad en 'martelarenoperaties'.

Deze boodschap kan aansprekend zijn voor de moslimjongeren op wie al-Qaeda en al-Sahab zich richten. Ze incorporeert verschillende gebeurtenissen en conflicten die tot grote verontwaardiging hebben geleid in de moslimwereld, en sluit daarom aan bij de ervaringen en ongenoegens van het grote publiek. Tegelijk herformuleert de boodschap deze ervaringen en ongenoegens in globale en religieuze termen, wat identificatie met medemoslims elders op de wereld kan versterken en gevoelens van (indirecte) vernedering kan oproepen. Door het jihadisme vervolgens te presenteren als de enige beweging die daadwerkelijk opkomt voor de getroffen geloofsgenoten, biedt het jongeren een mogelijkheid en model om in actie te komen. Het verschaft hen een gevoel van *empowerment* als (mogelijke) leden van de *umma*'s voorhoede die de islam verdedigt in de voetstappen van de Profeet. Evenals Mohammed en zijn metgezellen kunnen moslimjongeren de glorie van de islam herstellen, zo wordt gesuggereerd. Op deze manier biedt de jihadistische boodschap moslims in verschillende regio's van de wereld een manier om betekenis te geven aan hun leven die wordt ervaren als authentiek islamitisch, maar die tegelijkertijd uiterst modern is en daarom aansluit bij hun behoeften en ervaringen.

Het gecombineerde gebruik van zelfmoordaanslagen en martelarenvideo's is echter niet alleen een bruikbaar middel om het jihadistische gedachtegoed te verspreiden. Deze studie laat zien dat een goed begrip van de rol van zelfmoordaanslagen in het hedendaagse jihadisme ook inzicht vereist in de betekenissen van het geweld voor de daders en hun achterban. Zelfmoordaanslagen zijn namelijk een zeer expressieve vorm van geweld, zoals blijkt uit de geritualiseerde uitvoering van de aanslagen en de betekenissen die eraan worden toegeschreven in de martelarenvideo's.

Zowel de vorm van het geweld als al-Sahab's representaties ervan laten zien dat jihadistische zelfmoordaanslagen niet in de eerste plaats moeten worden opgevat als acties die gericht zijn op het behalen van de overwinning op het slagveld. Zij zijn eerder een uitdrukking van het idee dat jihadisten in het algemeen en de

'martelaren' in het bijzonder de pure islam van de profeet Mohammed en zijn metgezellen navolgen. De geritualiseerde voorbereiding en uitvoering van de acties relateren de daders veelvuldig aan vroeg-islamitische (martelaarschaps)tradities, en de video's vergelijken de aanslagen herhaaldelijk met het verlangen of zoeken naar martelaarschap door de Profeet en zijn metgezellen. Deze verwijzingen dienen niet zozeer ter legitimatie van de controversiële acties, maar laten zien dat zelfmoordaanslagen in de perceptie van de daders religieuze handelingen zijn: geritualiseerde vormen van verering die het hedendaagse equivalent vormen van de veldslagen en raids van de profeet Mohammed. Net als de zevende-eeuwse voorgangers zijn de jihadistische 'martelaren' bereid hun aardse bestaan op te offeren in de strijd voor God, islam en de *umma*, waarvoor zij worden beloond met de 'ultieme triomf': het Paradijs.

Naast ideeën rondom martelaarschap en het voorbeeld van de Profeet en zijn metgezellen, keren ook termen als eer, waardigheid, loyaliteit, opoffering en reinheid veelvuldig terug in de geritualiseerde uitvoering van het geweld en de martelarenvideo's. Deze waarden representeren het idee dat de 'martelaren' door hun zelfopoffering de geschonden eer en waardigheid van de *umma* herstellen en de moslimgebieden reinigen van de door ongelovigen veroorzaakte vervuiling. In de ervaring van de daders doen zelfmoordaanslagen de zwakheid en vernedering van de *umma* teniet en vergelden ze het moslimbloed dat is vergoten door de vijanden. De aanslagen belichamen daarom de triomf van de *umma*, niet zozeer op het slagveld, maar in termen van eerherstel, herwonnen waardigheid en reiniging.

Vanuit dit perspectief betoogt het proefschrift dat jihadistische zelfmoordaanslagen gezien kunnen worden als uitvoeringen van het jihadisme zelf. Ze zijn de ultieme uitdrukking van een aantal van zijn belangrijkste symbolen, verhalen, waarden, overtuigingen en gebruiken, en onderscheiden jihadisten hiermee van de *umma* en haar ongelovige en afvallige vijanden. Door de kracht, waardigheid, moed, vroomheid, loyaliteit en opofferingsbereidheid van de jihadisten te benadrukken, wijzen de aanslagen op het contrast met de zwakte, vernedering en lethargie van de *umma* en het ongeloof, het verraad en de gehechtheid aan het leven van haar vijanden. Door op deze wijze de grenzen van de jihadistische beweging uit te drukken en vorm te geven, worden de 'martelaren' levende definities van de jihadistische beweging. Hun aanslagen vertellen het verhaal van het jihadisme: een verhaal dat aanhangers kan aantrekken, binden en mobiliseren. Het verhaal dat ze uitdrukken kan aansprekend zijn voor moslimjongeren die geraakt worden door het lijden van hun geloofsgenoten en zich daarom aangetrokken voelen tot de enige beweging die het in hun ogen voor hun medemoslims opneemt. Het verhaal kan jihadisten met uiterst diverse achtergronden verbinden omdat het ruimte laat voor diversiteit, maar tegelijk gevoelens van solidariteit bewerkstelligt rondom het idee dat zij de vertegenwoordigers zijn van het ware geloof in de huidige episode van het tijdloze conflict tegen het kwaad. En het verhaal kan jihadisten aanzetten tot actie door te benadrukken dat ze onderdeel zijn van een krachtige, door God gesteunde beweging die de eer van de *umma* herstelt en haar land reinigt van de ongelovigen, en dus de overwinning zal behalen. De aanslagen zijn hierdoor niet alleen expressies van de jihadistische beweging, maar spelen ook een belangrijke rol in de constructie ervan.

De in deze studie gehanteerde benadering verschaft hiermee nieuwe inzichten in de fenomenen jihadisme en zelfmoordaanslagen alsook in de relatie tussen beide. Door het jihadisme niet te benaderen als een rigide en vastomlijnde beweging heeft het oog kunnen hebben voor het dynamische en hybride karakter van het jihadistische gedachtegoed. Hierdoor maakt het ook de aantrekkingskracht van het jihadisme voor moslimjongeren uit verschillende regio's met zeer uiteenlopende achtergronden inzichtelijk. Door zelfmoordaanslagen te benaderen vanuit het oogpunt van de betrokkenen zelf, laat dit onderzoek bovendien zien dat deze buitengewoon expressieve handelingen het potentieel aantrekkelijke jihadistische gedachtegoed publiceren onder de achterban en daarom een cruciale rol spelen in de vorming van de jihadistische beweging.

Hiermee verschaft deze studie niet alleen nieuwe inzichten in de zelfmoordaanslagen van al-Qaeda en de martelarenvideo's van al-Sahab, maar stelt het ons ook in staat om beter te begrijpen waarom sommige moslimjongeren zich aangetrokken voelen tot de strijd in landen als Syrië. Ook in het geval van de 'jihadgangers' naar deze regio is het van belang te kijken naar hun specifieke culturele achtergronden, religieuze opvattingen, sociale netwerken en psychologische profielen. Echter, zonder oog te hebben voor de sterke relatie tussen de jihad en thema's als loyaliteit, eer en waardigheid, zullen we nooit volledig kunnen begrijpen waarom sommige jongeren hun families achterlaten en zelfs bereid zijn hun levens te geven voor een strijd in een land waar ze nog nooit zijn geweest, te midden van mensen die ze nooit eerder hebben ontmoet.

Curriculum vitae

Pieter Nanninga (www.rug.nl/staff/p.g.t.nanninga) graduated in History and Religious Studies in 2007 (with honours), after which he carried out his PhD research at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen. Since 2011, he is attached to the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the same university, where he will occupy a position as Assistant Professor from August 2014. He teaches on politics, culture and religion in de modern Middle East and conducts research on jihadism, violence and media.